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THE
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CONDUCTED

BY THE

STUDENTS OF YALE COLLEGE.



*"Dum mens grata manet, nomen laudisque YALENSES
Cantabant SOBLES, unanimique PATRNS."*

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THE
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No. IX.

EDITORS FOR THE CLASS OF '60.

R. S. DAVIS,

W. FOWLER,

E. G. HOLDEN,

W. C. JOHNSTON,

C. H. OWEN.

What are you Laughing at?

I propose this question in all seriousness. You may never have felt more solemn in all your life, than at this moment, while reading these lines; nevertheless, I now give you a metaphorical poke in your ribs, and gravely ask, "What are you laughing at?" It may be, I shall repent having propounded this question, lest before you have heard all I have to say, I may be made the object of your mirthfulness. But did you ever endeavor to trace the multifarious causes of laughter? The important, serious, ill-timed, ridiculous and foolish causes? The necessity and abuse of laughter? The manner, pleasant and disgusting, of various persons while laughing? These all afford food for some reflection, even if it is not very profound. It is then from these considerations, and not from any puerile curiosity, that I inquire again, "What are you laughing at?" Perhaps you are one of those who never laugh. Who go through this jolly, sunny world, without a smile; who through a natural disposition or education, live among the various, mirth-provoking scenes of human folly, human weakness, and human pseudo-wisdom, without changing a muscle. If you are one of these stoics, please close this magazine, and brood over your acridity.

To such as you, I do not wish to speak. God pity you! I say, for you deserve no pity from men. You should be branded on the back, as they brand French criminals, and though time may heal the cautery, when adversity with its hard, iron, hand slaps you on the back, out it will come, the *Hater-of-mirth*. Thank heaven, there are not many like you.

History tells us of one man who never laughed but once. Marcus Crassus, surnamed Agelastus for this reason, had the enviable distinction of being provoked into a smile, only once in his life, by seeing a jackass eating a thistle. The sight of this weed, no doubt—"pricked the sides of his intent" to such a degree, that for once he was obliged to shake them. A witty Frenchman, on hearing this, replied that he never laughed so much, as when he saw a donkey kicking up his heels, and from sympathy, he was obliged to *rire* (to laugh).

Our Saviour, it is said, though on what authority I have never discovered, was not ever known to laugh. But are we prepared to believe, that he who wept for, and felt, and knew, all the sorrows and sufferings of others, could not also laugh and rejoice outwardly with their pleasures and happiness? Both are sympathetic emotions, and can we suppose, that he who was the embodiment of a perfect humanity, possessed the one, without the other? No, laughter is God-given; the safety-valve of pent-up griefs, and suppressed sorrow.

The causes of laughter are, of course, as many, as its occurrence is frequent. But we fear that the greatest cause of all, is,—nothing. How many times, my dear Sir, or Madame, have you laughed at nothing? I know you can't tell. And yet there's a presumption in favor of your being a sensible man or woman. I don't mean to say that you, particularly, have sinned in this respect. It is almost a universal weakness.

We cannot enumerate all the various modes of laughing, but in a great measure, a man's character may be determined by his laugh. Do you hear that loud, coarse, grating, cachination coming from the stentorian lungs of the vulgar rowdy; a laugh, which, when joined to a feeling of exultation or defiance, is brutal and insolent. Such laughter indicates at once the want of a general, gentle refinement. It savors of street corners, and is a sign of coarse boisterousness. We all of us expect, when we hear it, to find that its source is a person of gross features and form, suggestive of pantaloons turned up in a broad fold, as far as the knee; a huge cravat used to relieve a fiery-colored shirt and collar. This laugh tells the man, as much as the whistle

denotes the locomotive. Does not this correspond to the experience of all? It is just such a laugh as we might expect to hear, when, if placed in its owner's power, we should appeal in vain for mercy or protection. It is the jubilant shout of cruelty over weakness; it is the pæan of the bully.

There is another kind which is just as hard to bear, whose roughness and harshness is planed away, but, on the other hand, is sharp and bitter. It is the low-toned, sneering, derisive laugh; which casts a shade of disbelief on all you say, which turns, by its manner, every earnest thought into ridicule, and which it is so hard to meet and rebuff, because of its almost imperceptibility. It is that which represses an honest expression of feeling, and drops gall into all natural outbursts; which makes you cringe, if you have a real manly heart, in spite of yourself. Were you constituted otherwise, did you possess a sufficient amount of *brass*, you could put it down; but your susceptibility to its effects proves a delicacy, which shrinks from such a contest. If there is any thing that arouses a man's hatred, if there is any thing that excites his demoniacal passions, it is this under-tow of derision which carries you off your feet, do what you will. It is not the bold, open, cannon-shot of an honest enemy, which overturns your argument, or your opinions at once; but it is small shot coming from an intangible quarter, so to speak, which wounds you and stings you, and which you can neither fly from, nor resist. Of the two kinds of laughter which I have described, the former is to me, the more agreeable. I would not trust one possessing the latter, out of my sight. It is this practice of what is vulgarly called "snubbing," that has done more to make hypocrites of truthful men, done more to bury candour, and hide honesty, in the breasts of their possessors, than all that original depravity, and a natural tendency to deceit, could ever have accomplished. It is the work of the devil, with human demons for his instruments. Have none of you ever felt it? When you knew not, perhaps, of the presence of such an one, though experience may since have given you an intuitive perception of their proximity, and you have let out your honest nature and honest feelings, when you have spoken warmly of something good and true, and thus exposed yourself to that sarcastic smile, or more bitter contemptuous laugh, how your whole soul has leaped back, just as you withdraw your finger from hot iron, and, perhaps, for days after you feel the shock. O, it is cruel. With the nonchalance of a surgeon, they use the scalpel, and then with careless finger touch the exposed nerves, which