

**A LECTURE ON WIT,
HUMOUR,
AND PATHOS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649305612

A lecture on wit, humour, and pathos by Benjamin Lambert

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

BENJAMIN LAMBERT

**A LECTURE ON WIT,
HUMOUR,
AND PATHOS**

A LECTURE

ON

Wit, Humour, and Pathos.

DELIVERED AT BANSTEAD,

BY

BENJAMIN LAMBERT, Esq.

LONDON :

HENRY JAMES TRESIDDER,
17, AVE MARIA LANE, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1861.

250. m. 50.

WIT, HUMOUR, AND PATHOS.

WHEN I last addressed you, I spoke of the advantages of a Reading Room; and I now propose to illustrate further that part of my former lecture which related more particularly to the theme of Reading. But I intend to-night to consider the subject chiefly in its lighter and more genial aspects; and looking at it thus, it may be classed, I think, (though humour and pathos are often nearly allied,) under three separate heads,—the witty, the humorous, and the pathetic. As a literary work, of whatever kind,—be it a story, a poem, or a play, or even an address, of as slight and unpretending a character as mine, ought, according to a well-known rule of art, to have, like nature, light and shade;

and as my last lecture, in which I treated the matter somewhat gravely, had, perhaps, too dark a colouring, I propose to commence the present one with a little *light*; throwing the more serious and pathetic portions of my subject for the present into the *shade*,—so as to form, as it were, something like the background of the picture, to diversify and, it may be, deepen the interest of the whole.

Speaking generally, wit may be said to relate to things; humour to persons. In wit we have always presented to us a sudden and unexpected contrast of *ideas*; while ludicrous and unexpected *incidents* are mainly the elements of humour. We have humorous sayings and witty sayings; but wit, strictly, is confined to saying. Thus, when we call a person witty, we mean that what he *says* is witty; but we should hardly, perhaps, talk of a man's witty behaviour; we should more correctly speak of his humorous conduct. Wit is purely intellectual; humour thoroughly impulsive. Wit looks, as it were, *within*, to educe fine and nicely-drawn distinctions, and is the faculty of discerning and comparing opposite relations in words or things. Humour looks *without*, noting, as

it does so, the contrasts in human nature itself, the idiosyncrasies and peculiarities of character. Wit deals and revels in felicitous illustrations, and may be said to live in the world of fancy. Humour, more homely, trudges along through the nooks and corners, by the highways and the bye-paths of this work-day world, and lives in the sphere of action. The essence both of humour and of wit is so far similar, that either exists through the force of contrast; and the reason of that contrast being broader and more striking in humour than it ever is in wit, is, I think, because—certainly in most instances, if not in all—there is either something that is ludicrous in the nature of the incidents, or something that is grotesque in the character of the situation that heightens the force of a humorous description, or gives emphasis and point to a humorous remark. We have a striking illustration of this definition of humour, in the story of the Irishman who had an Englishman for his guest in an Irish hovel. The Irishman ekes out a scanty existence by keeping a pig, and he couldn't get on "at all, at all," without the pig; and, moreover, he keeps the animal in the very room (if room it can be called) where he

and his guest are going to dine,—an arrangement which, of course, outrages the Englishman's notions of ordinary decency and propriety. He therefore remonstrates with his friend upon having the pig there, just close to where they are, almost as if it was going to dine with them. "And what's the matter with the pig?" says the host; "hasn't he as much right to be here as either of us? Isn't it *he* that pays the rent?" Here, as I have said, the quaintness of the Irishman's retort is heightened by the peculiar position of the persons concerned; and so with most observations that have more humour than wit, the sense of the ludicrous is mainly derived from the humorous nature of the incidents themselves, which, when they are not actually present, are at any rate implied. Thus, in the Irishman's boast of the capital dinner he had had, we should lose half the point if we did not mentally contrast the exaggeration of the statement with what we can pretty shrewdly guess to have been the real fact, that, of *course*, he had had nothing but potatoes; but, says the Irishman, "I have fared sumptuously, for I've dined on potatoes and beef—barrin the beef."

Of humorous description, we have an apt ex-

ample in Cowper's story, or, as it is styled by the poet, the "Diverting History of John Gilpin;" the point of which history consists in the laughable adventures of the hero, "who went farther than he intended, and came safe home again." As this piece is very widely and generally known, I should hardly be justified in reading all of it; but, as it illustrates what I have said is the essence of humorous narrative, I will venture to read a portion of the poem.

" John Gilpin was a citizen
Of credit and renown ;
A train-band Captain eke was he
Of famous London town.

" John Gilpin's spouse said to her dear,
Though wedded we have been
These twice ten tedious years, yet we
No holiday have seen.

" To-morrow is our wedding-day,
And we will then repair
Unto the ' Bell ' at Edmonton,
All in a chaise and pair.

" My sister and my sister's child,
Myself and children three,
Will fill the chaise, so you must ride
On horseback after we.

“ The morning came, the chaise was brought,
 But yet was not allow'd
 To drive up to the door, lest all
 Should say that she was proud.

“ So three doors off the chaise was stay'd,
 Where they did all get in,—
 Six precious souls, and all agog
 To dash through thick and thin.

“ Smack went the whip, round went the wheel,
 Were never folk so glad ;
 The stones did rattle underneath,
 As if Cheapside were mad.

“ John Gilpin, at his horse's side,
 Seized fast the flowing mane,
 And up he got in haste to ride,
 But soon came down again.

“ For saddle-tree scarce reach'd had he,
 His journey to begin,
 When, turning round his head, he saw
 Three customers come in.

“ So down he came, for loss of time,
 Although it grieved him sore,
 Yet loss of pence, full well he knew,
 Would trouble him much more.

“ 'Twas long before the customers
 Were suited to their mind,
 When Betty screaming came down stairs,
 ‘ The wine is left behind ! ’

.