

**PETEY SIMMONS  
AT SIWASH**

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Petey Simmons at Siwash by George Fitch

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"Do you think that will help you?" said Saunders severely. **FRONTISPIECE.** See Page 105.

# PETEY SIMMONS AT SIWASH

BY

GEORGE FITCH

Author of "At Good Old Siwash,"  
"Homeburg Memories," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

G. C. WIDNEY



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## INTRODUCTION

Out of the beautiful Middle West in the first decade of the present century, there sprang to our notice a new and a true humorist, by name George Fitch. It is a rubric in the world's calendar when a new humorist is born, for the humorist is a man with a vision. He sees not as other men see, but when he tells his vision to us of the dull eyes, we exclaim, "Of course! anybody can see that. We have always thought so ourselves, but somehow we forgot to mention it. Show us something else that we have always seen and never knew it."

The humorist complies and we follow him gladly, laughingly and lovingly, but then comes some one with a solemn face and a strident voice, who speaks a weird language. And those in authority tell us, "Here is true greatness. Observe the melancholy countenance! Listen to the tragic tone of the voice! And behold! you can with difficulty understand the tongue in which he speaks. No one may surely know what he is saying. Is it not sublime?"

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## Introduction

Then we, we turn aside from the humorist whom we love and can understand and we say, "It must even be so. The humorist is too simple, too pleasurable and too easily comprehended. This Other is the worshipful one. Ah, how wonderful must be his thought, how deep his meaning; we comprehend him not at all."

For my part I am inclined to dispute the authorities flatly. I shall always insist that the master writer is one who is crystal clear without being commonplace, that comedy is higher than tragedy, that the man who leads me to the abiding joy in life deserves more of my thanks than the one who depresses and confuses me. If this be literary treason, make the most of it.

That George Fitch came out of the Middle West is also indicative. The Middle West is the nursery of our literary orchards. Much of its budded stock is transplanted early, but George Fitch came to full fruition in the soil which gave him birth. Here he was born and bred, here he was educated, here he married and reared his family, here he struggled and here he achieved. Born in the small town of Galva, matriculated and graduated at Knox College, Galesburg, and doing the bulk of his life-work at Peoria, he may fairly be said to reek of the soil of Illinois. Yet human beings

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(especially American human beings) are so much alike that the appeal of his work runs from horizon to horizon. Homeburg might have been in Maine and Siwash in California, or in any place between.

It is hardly necessary to mention that Knox College is not Siwash and Siwash is not Knox, but that Knox is appreciative of the Siwash fame is attested by the fact that the real college is to have a chapter room (planned by the "Betas") as a memorial to the creator of the fictitious college. Peoria, too, is to have a bronze Fitch tablet for the public library, and Galva, not to be outdone, is planning a monument.

Marble and stone and bronze! Strive as you may to endear and preserve his memory, how much less you accomplish than a stroke of his whimsical pen.

Like so many other successful writers, George Fitch came up through the stress and grind of daily newspaper work. He won his spurs on the Council Bluffs *Nonpareil* and the Peoria *Transcript* and he never entirely forsook the newspaper field, for even at the last his Vest Pocket Essays were appearing daily in hundreds of newspapers. But he was more than a newspaper-man, more than a magazinist, more than a maker of books. No