



The care of the Eyes in the Home

Here are a few simple hints that will help keep your eyes healthy and comfortable.

- (1) Sleep with the window well open. Fresh air benefits the eyes.
- (2) Don't read facing or backing the window. Arrange if possible, for the light to come over your left shoulder.
- (3) Never rub the eye if you have a piece of dirt in it, or if you have a sty or boil. Always bathe the eye and if the trouble persists, consult a doctor.
- (4) Don't read in bright sunlight or twilight.
- (5) If you have the slightest doubt as to the efficiency of your sight, consult a Qualified Practitioner at once.

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THE SERIOUS WORK OF PROFESSOR LEACOCK

IN this article for "The Listener," A.M.R. estimates the place in literature of Professor Stephen Leacock, famous humorist, economist and political scientist, whose death in Canada at the age of 75, was announced the other day.

MY first encounter with Leacock was in the *Children's Newspaper*. Under the picture of a melancholy man sipping tea in a restaurant, it was somewhat redundantly explained that Mr. Stephen Leacock, the celebrated Canadian humorist now visiting England, did not look in the least like what one expects a humorist to appear. That scotched my youthful belief that "a humorist" meant a "funny man" like Uncle John, someone bubbling with jokes, a stage comedian in real life. Probably, however, plenty of adults make an error nearly as childish in thinking of a humorist as a sort of juggler, a prestidigitator with words and "funny situations." To them I protest the seriousness of Professor Leacock.

No. *not* solemnity. Leacock was a gifted man of extreme versatility. But he did not possess solemnity—except inside his conjuror's hat. Stage entertainer he was, of course. We have all held our breaths, then roared, at his acrobatics with words—"taking a rise out of words" he called it. Remember Sir Guido (the Gimlet of Ghent) mounting his steed and riding off wildly in all directions. Remember the solitary horseman appearing on a bluff, followed by another, and yet another, until the sky line was crowded with solitary horsemen. Remember Oyster McOyster McShamrock clad in half-hose with tartan sporran half down his thighs, a half-coat half hiding his brawny chest, while from his bonnet a rhinosceros feather rose halfway into the air. Remember Mistress McShamrock "knitting breeks for their son Jamie as a surprise against his ordination. Already it was shaping that way. . . ." But remember also Leacock's comment on some learned reviewer's taking of Mark Twain to pieces to see how he ticked. "Mark Twain's humour is simply an ingenious mixture of meiosis and hyperbole" explained the reviewer in conclusion. "Now we know how. Take one

quart meiosis, three pints hyperbole. Mix thoroughly. Stand in a cool place. . ." commented Leacock, or words to this effect.

"A Highly Sensitive Person"

The point is, of course, that to be a real humorist, one must be something more than a daring young man on a verbal trapeze. One must be a critic. One must be, that is, a highly sensitive person, able to see things as they really are, not as we have got used to pretending they are. Then, if such a person has in addition, the ability to describe what he sees as brightly and as swiftly as he sees it, we hail him humorist and pay tribute in book royalties—or else we hound him down for subversion and indecency. Which of these two we do depends mainly, I think, on whether the critic himself sees with an indignant or an indulgent eye. Shaw, for example, has alternated each. We have caught him winking—and not known what to make of him.

Look at Leacock this way. "Scholars tell us," he writes, "that Aristophanes was probably the wittiest man that ever lived: so witty that it takes half a page to explain one of his jokes." Now why is that funny? Is it not because the writer has suddenly flung open a window in the well-wall of standardised literary judgment that entombs us, and we gasp as a sunbeam of true perspective flashes in. Possibly half of Leacock's "funny pieces" have their ground-work effect on us in this way. There is "The Barber's Outline of History," for example, which proves in three pages what many philosophical and theological tomes have laboured in vain to persuade—namely that *all* interpretations of *all* events, no matter how scientific they set out to be, simply reflect the writer's own historical situation. Leacock did it, of course, by following through in political and economic detail "man's progress from Unbarbarism to Barbarism" on the solemn assumption that *the* motive force of

(Continued on next page)



"I have worked at billiards for half a century. I'll need another." Stephen Leacock in his Canadian home.