

## COLLECTED LAUGHS

ALPHABETICAL ORDER. A Gallimaufry, composed by Daniel George for the Diver-sion and Solace of the Ruminant Reader. Jonathan Cape.

I WOULD recommend this to you as a bed-book, except that you might break the springs with laughing. The largest section of it, "Pick and Choose," was first published in 1936. Reading it now for the first time, I feel deeply resentful that nobody has brought it to my notice before this. They've had 13 years to do it in, haven't they?

Daniel George is one of the best, and wittiest, of English reviewers; a man who has browsed, not only in contemporary pastures, but in the oddest corners of literature. The gallimaufry he here presents is an astonishing piece of work. The pages dance with wit, wisdom, absurdity, charming sentiment, and cheerful scurrility. The quotations deal with just about every conceivable topic—Love, Death, Friendship, Sleep, Ear-holes, Homer, Beetle-brows, the Relaxing of the Uvula, Medicines and Charms, Drunkenness, Dreams, Washing Up, Crocodiles, Angelic love, and the Jerusalem Artichoke are only a few out of hundreds. I like very well this comment on "Lord Bute," from Sir Nathaniel Wraxall's *Historical Memoirs* (1836):

Lord Bute, when young, possessed a very handsome Person, of which Advantage he was not insensible; and he used to pass many Hours every Day, as his Enemies asserted, occupied in contemplating the Symmetry of his own Legs.

The candour of the great is sometimes shocking. This is Matthew Arnold, writing a private letter:

Burns is a beast, with splendid gleams, and the medium in which he lived, Scotch peasants, Scotch Presbyterians, and Scotch drink, is repulsive.

One of the evidences of maturity in the mind of a human being is his ability to face the fact that there are certain problems that are insoluble. Often, however, there is a way out, if one thinks long and hard enough:

Mr. —, who loved buttered muffins, but durst not eat them because they disagreed with his stomach, resolved to shoot himself; and then he ate three buttered muffins for breakfast, before shooting himself, knowing that he should not be troubled with indigestion.

I must quote this, by Dorothy Osborne, without comment. She is writing to William Temple, in the year 1655:

What an Age doe wee live in where 'tis a Miracle if in ten Couples that are married two of them live soe as not to publish it to the world that they cannot agree.

Here are a few more, picked out for their brevity:

Elizabeth Drewe, a Devonshire Gentlewoman, is reported never to have spat, nor the Indian Nation.—John Heydon, 1662. He (Wordsworth) said, once in a wood, Mrs. Wordsworth and a lady were walking, when the stock dove was cooing. A

farmer's wife coming by said to herself, "Oh, I do like stock doves." Mrs. Wordsworth, in all her enthusiasm for Wordsworth's poetry, took the old woman to her heart. "But," continued the old woman, "some like them in a pie; for my part, there's nothing like 'em stewed in onions."—R. B. Haydon, 1841.

The reprobate Lord Ross, being on his death-bed, was desired by his chaplain to call on God. He replied, "I will if I go that way; but I don't believe I shall."—Horace Walpole, 1799.

The foppery of love-verses, when a person is ill and indisposed, is perfect ipecacuanha.—William Shenstone, 1764.

The most necessary thing in the World, and yet the least usual, is to reflect that those we deal with may know how to be as arrant Knaves as ourselves.—George Savile, First Marquis of Halifax, 1750.

But these few quotations are entirely inadequate to convey the quality of this enchanting Irish-stew of a book. There are two chuckles on every page, and a good honest belly laugh every three pages.

Daniel George's "Alphabetical Order," which is also included, is an amusing, sometimes gaily malicious, and always beguiling series of comments on life and letters to-day. Then there is a "Fragment of an Imaginary Autobiography," which

is a delight; and, to wind up with, a number of extracts from the author's notebooks.

A friend complained to me the other day that it was a long time since he had read a book that made him laugh. I am going to pass this one on to him—as a loan, not a gift. It has brought me more joy than anything I've come across for ages.

—A.R.D.F.

## THE GUMFIELDS

THE GUMDIGGER: The Story of Kauri Gum. By A. H. Reed, A. H. and A. W. Reed, Wellington. 15/-.

THIS review is coloured by nostalgia.

Like Mr. Reed, I have had a gum-spear in my hand, though I was only playing with digging in school holidays, and it was at the southern limit of the kauri, in the Bay of Plenty, and not in North Auckland, on the gum-fields proper. But I remember the camps of Maori diggers, and the excitement of finding pieces of gum. Then in Auckland city in the 'nineties and early nineteen-hundreds, gum was important. You could sniff it in the city, as you could freshly cut timber. I used to pass a store at the corner of Customs Street where they sorted gum for export. The gum-dust came out in a fine cloud, and you couldn't escape its sweet resinous smell. At one time kauri gum was fifth in New Zealand's exports. Yes, times were better, I heard, a lawyer say early in this century, but it was a pity that all three of Auckland's chief products were exhaustible—gold, timber and gum. No mention of the coming possibilities of butter and cheese. Well, in 1947-48 the export of gum was 1,156 tons, valued at £115,000. In the previous

year export of butter from New Zealand was 119,000 tons, of which 91,000 tons came from the Auckland district.

North of Auckland were the mysterious gumfields, that Northland in parts so remote, with its patches of railways and execrable roads—or no roads at all—the cradle of New Zealand, but

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