



THRIFT.

Peoples Body (to Townsman who was supposed to be in London on a visit).  
"E-eh, MAD! YER SUNE NAME AGAIN!"  
"E-eh, IT'S JUST A RUNGUS PLACE, THAT! MUM, A MAD NAY GEM!  
"THE-ERE AMUSE TWA HOURS WHEN—SARG—WENTY SARPENCE!!!"

A famous comic cartoon: "Thrift," by Charles Keene, published in "Punch" in 1868

# "PUNCH": 1841-1941

## The Centennial Of A Great Comic Journal

On the evening of July 17, the date of the first number of "Punch" in 1841, 2YA will broadcast a centennial tribute

and worship of good form is a charge brought against *Punch* by a leading Australian writer, himself a humorist. Huntin', shootin' and fishin' don't mean so much to us as they do to a large section of *Punch* subscribers in Britain, and in the overseas Empire as distinct from the Dominions. Like Brigadier Gérard, who earned the undying execration of the British Army for his deed of shame that day with the hounds in Portugal, we do not see why it should be such a heinous offence to kill a fox.

Yet, I feel sure many New Zealanders will be keenly interested in the centennial of *Punch*. They read it more or less regularly; they know some of its household-word jokes and cartoons like "Bang Went Saxpence," and "Dropping the Pilot"—and they are proud of it as a British institution. For it is a British institution—perhaps not second even to *The Times* in prestige, and more widely known in its contents. *The Times* is aloof, and, shall we say it?—slightly pontifical; *Punch*—despite all exceptions I have noted—speaks a language we can all understand. We know what Phil May means when "Liza is asked who scratched her face and replies: "Another lily"; what Frank Reynolds means when he depicts a cricketer glancing a baby car to leg with his umbrella; what the post-war guest in a private house signifies when he asks if there isn't somebody about to whom they ought to say cheerio.

### Small Beginnings

Like every other great journal, *Punch* sprang from small beginnings. It was started a hundred years ago on the model of the Paris *Charivari*, whose name it still keeps as a "sub-heading." Its capital was £25, and it had a struggle. A Londoner who read the first number in a bus tossed it aside with the comment: "One of these ephemeral things they bring out; it won't last a fortnight!" Alas for cocksureness! *Punch* has lasted a hundred years, which is a long life for a journal. Why did it succeed? Because it was better than its rivals; because it was well edited, and attracted talent and genius. The three main pillars of the early *Punch* were John Leech, Douglas Jerrold and Thackeray. Leech was a great black-and-white humorist and cartoonist; Douglas Jerrold had a genius for wit and humour, and was also a passionate crusader for social justice; and Thackeray was, well, Thackeray. But *Punch* in those early days was a very different *Punch* from the paper we and our fathers have known. It was Radical and personal—a good deal more personal than the taste of to-day would permit. Journalism was like that then.

You went for public men and institutions bald-headed and went on doing it. *Punch's* discreditable attacks on the Prince Consort would shock public opinion to-day. When Bulwer Lytton called Tennyson "School-Miss Alfred," *Punch* published Tennyson's reply—"the padded man that wears the stays," and "you band-box!" Lytton deserved what he got, but can you imagine *Punch* printing such a comment to-day on —? (but again I leave you to fill in the gap).

And *Punch* gave the world Hood's "Song of the Shirt," written when Hood was dying, the best-known social reform poem in the language. We must not forget that "Mr. Punch," as befits a humorist, has always had his serious side. We saw it in John Tenniel's cartoons, which had dignity and majesty as well as humour. Some of the best obituary verse in the last hundred years has appeared in *Punch*. And don't forget that *Punch* published "In Flanders Fields," of which we are reminded every year when we buy our memorial poppies.

I said that *Punch* was modelled on the French *Charivari* but with a difference. It determined from the first not to be scurrilous, and to be clean. Thackeray said *Punch* had never brought a blush to a girl's cheek, and it never has. It raised the whole standard of comic journalism. It has been criticised for being too respectable. A French critic said *Punch* was a little too much of a gentleman; "what we want is to be enlightened." We are on firmer ground, I think, if we say *Punch* is often too tame. I myself have often wished it would get more bite into its cartoons, and be a little more drastic in its choice of jokes.

### Public School Tone

As the years passed *Punch* underwent a change. It ceased to be a Radical journal with a strong personal tone, and became a Liberal paper (perhaps not too Liberal at times) mainly for the upper and upper-middle classes, a journal that corrected classical misquotations, specialised in highly polished light verse, and very often joked from the angle of Mayfair and Clubland. A great deal of its contents demanded in its readers a public school and even a University education.

Its greatest achievement, I think, has been to express and enthrone a national characteristic of the English people—good humour. The difference between English humour and Latin and Teutonic humour is best exemplified in its pages. Its defects arise partly from this supreme quality. Good humour is apt to decline



DROPPING THE PILOT  
(Bismarck and the Kaiser)

One of "Punch's" most celebrated serious cartoons. Drawn by John Tenniel, it was published on March 29, 1890

into insipidity. The sayings of pert children, for example, are often given too high a value. Cartoons are sometimes just pictorial sentimentalities. But when all this is said, how much remains! Think of the roll of artists and writers in the last seventy years or so. Think of Charles Keene, that master of middle-class portraiture (he was the artist of the "Bang Went Saxpence" joke), of George du Maurier and his gloriously handsome women; of Phil May, whose drawings meant more to a joke than perhaps those of any other artist *Punch* has ever had; of Raven Hill, George Morrow, "Fougasse," and Frank Reynolds, with his Prussian family at their morning hate and his priceless rustic cricketers. "Oi be sorry to take ye off Jarge, but I must let the vicar 'ave a go before the ball gets egg-shaped." And on the literary side, "Happy Thoughts" by Burnand, and the immortal Mr. Pooter of "The Diary of a Nobody" (by the brothers Grossmith), now in "Everyman's Library," the urbane articles of E. V. Lucas, and A. P. Herbert's dazzling sword-play for better English. As to light verse, there never was a journal that published so much that was first rate.

### Social Barometer

As a social history of Britain *Punch* has no rival. There you may find all the changes in politics, changes in fashions, customs, habits, amusements, ways of thought—not only big spectacular things, but little things that are straws in the wind. Here is but one example out of thousands. A charming-looking post-war girl introduces her young dancing partner to her mother as "Tibby." The mother is glad to meet any friend of her daughter's, "Mr.—er—" and she pauses for him to give his name. "Speak up, Tibby, you ass," says the girl, "I suppose you've got some sort of a name!"

So congratulations to *Punch*—unrivalled, representative, a monument to the English genius for tolerance and kindly humour—and a centenarian!

—A.M.

## THE GATES OF DAMASCUS

(Continued from previous page)

midst of her green and fertile plain. From the new suburb of El Meidan one can look over the cupolas and minarets of Damascus to the plain beyond. In the spring blossom the apricots and the almonds, and like a white frost cloud the bloom foams from the earth. Nothing is more lovely than this sight of fruitfulness springing from the waste land. To those ancient caravans, winding a dusty way from Aleppo, Antioch and Samarkand, Damascus must have seemed the city of their dreams—a paradise on earth. In fact it is said that Mahomet, standing before the city for the first time, said, "I cannot enter this city. Since Allah gives man but one paradise, I must not enter this on earth, lest I have none in heaven."

To-day the gates of Damascus have been opened to the British and Free French forces. The old city was dreaming in her summer heat when again the roar of modern guns smote upon her silence. It seems strange that even the oldest of cities should not be able to extricate herself from the toils of war.