

HARRAP'S BOOK OF

HUMOROUS

QUOTATIONS



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Cartoons by

GREN.

Chosen and introduced by

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FOREWORD

There are few writings as humourless as an erudite discourse on humour. This foreword will therefore be both brief and free from erudition.

Humour is wide-ranging, and covers anything from the belly-laugh to the inward smile. I have chosen quotations which reflect this diversity, and have drawn them, for instance, from music-hall and radio comics (such as Lauder and Howerd), from professional humorists (such as Muir, Boothroyd, and Coren), from serious authors in less serious mood (such as Wells and Huxley), as well as from many other kinds of mirth-providers.

Nearly two hundred authors are presented, and about three thousand quotations. The book does not pretend to be fully comprehensive, but it is perhaps fair to say that most notable humorists who have expressed themselves in English or American (the two are not necessarily the same) have been included. Not everybody will find every item amusing, nor should anyone expect to. One man's chuckle is another man's yawn.

The book is intended to be read for pleasure, especially by incorrigible browsers. Sources are given wherever possible, but it is not an academic reference book. Humorous writing begins to be easily intelligible when English begins to be a modern language. This is roughly around the beginning of the eighteenth century, so I go no further back than Congreve and

Vanbrugh, who are modern enough to make modern audiences laugh. However, quotations from the present century predominate.

As well as offering material for browsing, I have aimed at providing ammunition for public and private speakers. A topic index is therefore included. Assuming that readers of such a book as this will not be helpless simpletons needing to be led by the hand all the way, I have given only the page numbers to indicate where relevant quotations may be found. The reader's own intelligence should enable him to select which items he needs.

G.F. LAMB

GEORGE ADE

George Ade (1866–1944), American humorist and dramatist, wrote for the *Chicago Record*, and was author of several Broadway shows, e.g. *The College Widow* (1904) and books, e.g. *Bang! Bang!* (1928).

- 1 "Whom are you?" he said, for he had been to night school.
Bang! Bang!
- 2 He had been kicked in the head when young and believed everything he read in the Sunday papers. *The America of George Ade*
- 3 In the city a funeral is just an interruption of traffic; in the country it is a form of entertainment. *Cosmopolitan Magazine* (February, 1928).
- 4 Ade's Law: Anyone can win – unless there happens to be a second entry.
- 5 If it were not for the presents, an elopement would be preferable to a wedding. *Forty Modern Fables*
- 6 For parlour use, the vague generality is a life-saver. *Ib.*
- 7 The time to enjoy a European tour is about three weeks after you unpack. *Ib.*
- 8 Draw your salary before spending it. *Ib.*
- 9 One can only rest after plenty of practice. *Ib.*
- 10 Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home for wearing what you like. *Ib.*
- 11 Do unto yourself as your neighbours do unto themselves.
Hand-Made Fables
- 12 Familiarity breeds contentment. *Ib.*



- 13 One man's poison ivy is another man's spinach. *Ib.*
- 14 Every man is the architect of his own fortunes, but the neighbours superintend the construction. *Ib.*
- 15 A bird in the hand may be worth two in the bush but it's a positive embarrassment to anyone not in the poultry business. *Fables*
- 16 She was a soprano of the kind often used for augmenting grief at a funeral. *Ib.*
- 17 A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but wouldn't cost half as much. *Ib.*
- 18 The music teacher came twice a week to bridge the awful gap between Dorothy and Chopin.
- 19 Posterity is what you write for after being turned down by many publishers.
- 20 It is no time for mirth and laughter,
The cold grey dawn of the morning after.
The Sultan of Sulu

FRED ALLEN

Fred Allen (1894–1956), American comedian who at one time appeared as a juggler in vaudeville, but achieved his greatest fame as a satirical commentator on radio. *Treadmill to Oblivion* (1954) was his autobiography.

- 1 A celebrity is a person who works hard all his life to become known, then wears dark glasses to avoid being recognized.
Treadmill to Oblivion
- 2 A man who is paid in the dark can't make light of his salary. *Ib.*
- 3 (Of Jack Benny)
His arm looks like a buggy whip with fingers. *Ib.*
- 4 Echo men are important in advertising. They follow in the wake of the big executive and echo his sentiments. *Ib.*
- 5 In show business there are more chorus girls kept than promises. *Ib.*
- 6 The grass is always greener in the other fellow's field – so let him worry about cutting it. *Ib.*
- 7 How do you stop a dead fish from smelling? Cut off its nose.
Much Ado About Me
- 8 The last time I saw him he was walking down Lovers' Lane, holding his own hand. *Ib.*
- 9 When they lit all the candles on her birthday cake, six people were overcome with the heat. *Ib.*
- 10 He's a good boy. Everything he steals he brings home to his mother. *Ib.*
- 11 Money talks. It's the only conversation worth hearing when times are bad. *Ib.*

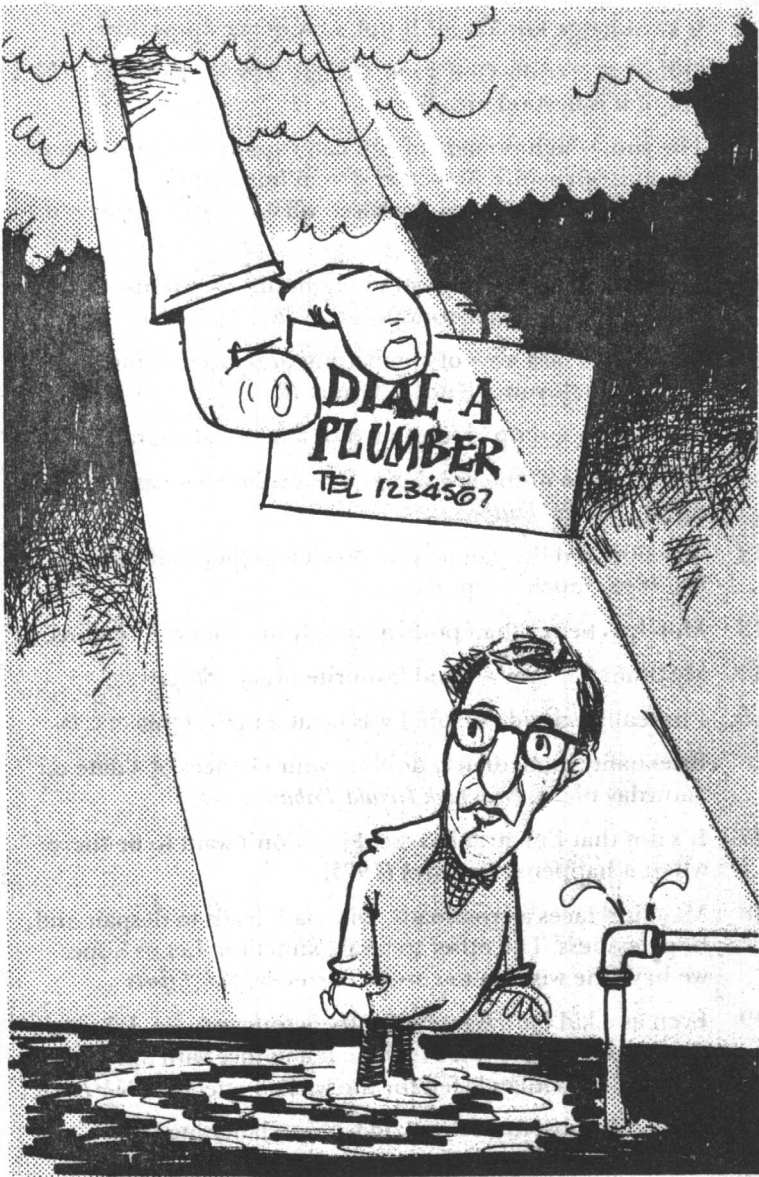
Fred Allen

- 12 The penguin flies backwards because he doesn't care to see where he's going but wants to see where he's been. *The Backward View*
- 13 I have just returned from Boston. It's the only thing to do if you find yourself there. *Letter to Groucho Marx (1953)*
- 14 A committee is a group of people who individually can do nothing but as a group decide that nothing can be done.
- 15 Most of us spend the first six days of the week sowing wild oats, and then go to church on the Sunday to pray for a crop failure.
- 16 A gentleman is a man who wouldn't hit a woman with his hat on.
- 17 I don't want to own anything that won't fit into my coffin.

WOODY ALLEN

As an actor this American comedian (1935-) tends to appear as a misfit for whom things usually go wrong. In life, he has directed, written, and acted in a number of successful screenplays, e.g. *What's New Pussycat?* (1965), *Annie Hall* (1977), mostly wryly humorous.

- 1 Not only is there no God, but try getting a plumber at weekends. *Getting Even*
- 2 Eternal nothingness is O.K. if you're dressed for it. *Ib.*
- 3 I don't believe in an afterlife, but I'm bringing a change of underwear. *Ib.*
- 4 If man were immortal, do you realize what his meat bills would be? *Ib.*



Woody Allen

- 5 Is knowledge knowable? If not, how do we know this? *Ib.*
- 6 Suffering is really God's will, though why He gets such a kick out of it is beyond me. *Ib.*
- 7 The sun, which is made of gas, can explode at any moment, sending our entire planetary system hurtling to destruction. Students are advised what the average citizen can do in such a case. *Ib.*
- 8 Most criminals actually work long hours, frequently in buildings without air-conditioning. *Ib.*
- 9 One of the best ways of combatting organized crime is telling the criminals you are not at home. *Ib.*
- 10 I finally wound up getting sued by a fictional character. *Ib.*
- 11 Death is one of the few things that can be done as easily lying down. *Without Feathers*
- 12 The lion and the calf may lie down together, but the calf won't get much sleep. *Ib.*
- 13 Money is better than poverty, if only for financial reasons. *Ib.*
- 14 My brain – it's my second favourite organ. *Sleeper*
- 15 I'm really a timid person. I was beaten up by Quakers. *Ib.*
- 16 Bisexuality immediately doubles your chances of a date on Saturday night. *New York Herald Tribune (1975)*
- 17 It's not that I'm afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens. *Newsweek (1975)*
- 18 Mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and hopelessness. The other to total extinction. Let us hope we have the wisdom to choose correctly. *Side Effects*
- 19 Even as a kid I always went for the wrong women. When we went to see *Snow White* everyone fell in love with Snow White. I immediately fell for the wicked queen. *Annie Hall*
- 20 Sex is the most fun I ever had without laughing. *Ib.*

- 21 I think crime pays. The hours are good and you travel a lot.
Take the Money and Run
- 22 Making a funny film provides all the joy of getting your leg caught in the blades of a threshing-machine. *Esquire*
- 23 My wife was immature. I'd be at home in the bath and she'd come in and sink my boats.
- 24 If only God would give me some clear sign! Like making a large deposit in my name at a Swiss bank.

KINGSLEY AMIS

Kingsley Amis (1922–), educated at the City of London School and Oxford, was a university lecturer at Swansea, Princeton, and Peterhouse, Cambridge. He achieved great success with his novel *Lucky Jim* (1954), since when he has become a leading contemporary novelist, and also a critic and poet.

- 1 I got the laundry to render up a shirt of mine that they had been sitting on, if not wearing, for a couple of months.
Girl, 20
- 2 He handed me a small tumbler containing what I tried, with some success, not to think of as a urine sample from one gravely ill. *Ib.*
- 3 The real trouble with liars...was there could never be any guarantee against their occasionally telling the truth. *Ib.*
- 4 Vivienne was wearing a fearful trouser-suit that looked as if it had been made out of the seat-covers of some excitingly new motor-coach. *Ib.*
- 5 Roy paid the taxi, crying out like a man in a film falling off a high building when a coin rolled over the edge of his hand. *Ib.*
- 6 "At least they didn't have pop music in the Black Hole of Calcutta," said Roy. *Ib.*

- 7 Nothing short of physical handicap has ever made anyone turn over a new leaf. *The Green Man*
- 8 A naked woman out of doors is either a sun-worshipper or a rape victim; a man in the same state is either a sexual criminal or a plain lunatic. *Ib.*
- 9 Haven't you noticed how we all specialize in what we hate most? *Lucky Jim*
- 10 Dixon felt like a man who knows he won't be able to jump on to the moving train if he stops to think about it. *Ib.*
- 11 Women are all keen on marrying men they don't much like. *Ib.*
- 12 He wished this set of dances would end; he was hot, his socks seemed to have been sprayed with fine adhesive sand, and his arms ached like those of a boxer keeping his guard up after fourteen rounds. *Ib.*
- 13 He must see if he could somehow restore his financial position from complete impossibility to its usual level of merely imminent disaster. *Ib.*
- 14 Welch's driving seemed to have improved slightly; at any rate, the only death Dixon felt himself threatened by was death from exposure to boredom. *Ib.*
- 15 He was of the faith chiefly in the sense that the church he currently did not attend was Catholic. *One Fat Englishman*
- 16 It was no wonder that people were so horrible when they started life as children. *Ib.*
- 17 Work was like what cats were supposed to be; if you disliked and feared it and tried to keep out of its way, it knew at once and sought you out. *Take a Girl Like You*

- 18 She had exercised a mysterious attraction and then an
unmysterious repulsion on two former husbands, the
second of whom had had to resort to fatal coronary
disease to get away from her. *Jake's Thing*
- 19 Once there had been an exit on this side of the station, but i
had been discovered...that the only people who benefited
were passengers. *Ib.*
- 20 He dreamed he had to go on parade but couldn't find his
boots, equipment, rifle or cap, and didn't know the way to
the parade ground. *Ib.*
- 21 Death has something to be said for it:
There's no need to get out of bed for it.
Collected Poems
- 22 Fifty today, old lad?
Well, that's not doing so bad.
Ib. (Ode to Me)

ANONYMOUS

- 1 A minor operation is one performed on somebody else.
- 2 I know two things about the horse,
And one of them is rather coarse:
- 3 Curry gives me indigestion.
- 4 Sex is bad for one – but it's good for two.
- 5 Horse power was fine when only horses had it.
- 6 One good turn gets most of the blanket.
- 7 It isn't how you win or lose
But how you place the blame.
- 8 (Notice in rear window of a Mini)
When I grow up I want to be a Rolls.

Anonymous

- 9 (Notice in car window)
Overtaker! See you at the Undertaker's!
- 10 (Advertisement in *Guardian* for job vacancy)
We aim to develop a non-sexist approach to working with young people...Applicants must be female.
- 11 (Notice on front gate)
Doberman guard dog on premises. Survivors will be prosecuted.
- 12 (Sign outside a do-it-yourself shop)
Special offer – disappearing loft ladders. Only two left.
- 13 My boss has boots so shiny I can see my face in them.
- 14 The only way to avoid making mistakes is to gain experience.
The only way to gain experience is to make mistakes.
- 15 The French national anthem is The Mayonnaise.
- 16 "Hi, mister! Want to buy some pornographic postcards?"
"No thanks, I haven't got a pornograph."
- 17 An Irishman found his wife unfaithful and threatened to shoot himself unless she gave up her lover. **She only** laughed. "You may laugh," he told her, "but you're next!"
- 18 Wife: "What would you do if you came home one day and found me in bed with another man?"
Husband: "I'd give him a good bashing – with his white stick."
- 19 "Waiter! This coffee tastes like mud!"
"Well, sir, it was ground only a few minutes ago."
- 20 To err is human, but to foul things up completely requires a computer.

REGINALD ARKELL

Reginald Arkell (d. 1959), English author, journalist, and dramatist, wrote many revues and musical comedies, e.g. *The Last Waltz* (1922), and was even better known for his light verse on gardening themes, e.g. *Green Fingers* (1934).

- 1 Of every single garden pest
 I think I hate the Green Fly best.
 Green Fingers
- 2 There was one Green Fly, I recall;
 I hated him the most of all.
 He sat upon my finest rose
 And put his fingers to his nose. *Ib.*
- 3 I'd rather have a skylark
 Than a parrot at the Zoo. *Ib.*
- 4 The Japanese
 Grow tiny trees
 About so high.
 I wonder why.
 More Green Fingers
- 5 How doth the little optimist
 Walk round the Chelsea Show,
 And scribble in a little book
 The things he means to grow. *Ib.*
- 6 I wonder why
 Some flowers will never try. *Ib.*
- 7 "Anyone with any sense
 Is certain to agree
 That English names for English flowers
 Is good enough for we." *Ib.*

- 8 The ground is so hard that you can't do a thing
But read about gardens and wait for the Spring.
Green Fingers Again
- 9 "If winter comes," the old-time lyric ran,
"Can Spring be far behind?" You bet it can! *Ib.*
- 10 I had just begun to like work in a garden
When all my arteries started to harden. *Ib.*
- 11 If you have got a microscope,
Look closely and you'll find
A midge can bite you from in front
Or sting you from behind. *Ib.*
- 12 Spinach is good for you.
It purifies the blood –
And looks like green mud.
And a Green Thumb
- 13 Croquet is all very well in its way,
If you hate all the people you happen to play.
But don't be discouraged – though starting as friends,
You'll hate them like poison before the game ends. *Ib.*
- 14 When you get a gardener
You'll discover very soon
That although you pay the piper
You will never call the tune. *Ib.*
- 15 Suppose you planted *people* in a row..
Suppose they were inspected every day
And all the weedy ones were thrown away! *Ib.*
- 16 I have never met any countryman who crept quietly along a
hedge, unless it was to shoot something. *Richard Jefferies*
- 17 When was there a prophet who found honour in his own
country until he was very rich or very dead? *Ib.*