Believe May Irwin, Woman Can't Outlive Her Sense of Humor

It's Born in Her and Keeps Her Alive, Especially When It's Mixed With a Drop of Scotch—So Why Not Laugh With Her When You Get the Chance?

BY CHARLES DARNTON.

AFTER getting behind one of those trustworthy upright trunks I ventured to inquire:

"Has the funny woman an age limit?"

"There's nothing personal in that, I hope?" remarked Miss May Irwin, eyeing me narrowly and at the same time stealthily drawing toward her a heavy glass paperweight warranted to kill at forty paces.

"How could there be?" I asked, keeping on the safe side of the question as well as the trunk.

"That's not bad," she was good enough to say, "but," she added, turning to abuse poor de Zayas, "that caricature you made of me—well, I love caricatures—BUT!"

Her fingers tightened about the deadly paperweight and for a moment words failed her. Strong emotion was obviously working overtime in her. I was quietly enjoying the situation when she turned on me with:

"And I've a little something for you. I really ought to show it you. And then again I oughtn't. It's an acknowledgment from the author of my play to the critics and there are a couple of lines written in red ink, as well as cold blood, for you."

I begged her not to spare me. (Anything to help a friend, I thought, glancing at my unhappy companion, who was turning as pale as the ghost in "Hamlet.")

"All right!" agreed Miss Irwin, charging upon her writing desk and dashing back with an envelope from which she drew a letter that looked as though it had been written by a press agent in the throes of a Sunday "ad." "What do you think of that?" she demanded.

"It shows Mrs. Cushing has a sense of humor," I was bound to admit.

"You bet she has!" declared Miss Irwin, bubbling over with enthusiasm for the author of "Widow by Proxy." "What's more," she went on, "I DO admire a clever woman. And then, too, she's so easy to look at. I've seen lady authors that made me feel in need of smoked glasses—but this one—well, she's the ultra sort of thing you know—makes you think of a fashion plate come to life. You ought to see her!"

Up went Miss Irwin's eyes and hands. There was a moment of eloquent silence in which I was left to reflect that an audience never knows the right time to call "Author!" It usually brings forth a self-satisfied individual who looks like a butcher gone wrong, or else a shy, bobbing creature who seems to be the noblest work of the village dressmaker. To think that a feminine fashion plate had been left to blush unseen was like dropping a black ball into the Authors' Club.

"And now," resumed Miss Irwin, testing the hotel furniture, "we're right back where we started. What's the use of talking about an age limit for a funny woman? She hasn't any—that's the answer. Just think back for a moment to dear old Mrs. Gilbert. She was a comedienne to the day of her death, and she lived to be seventy-five or eighty. The things she used to say in the old Augustin Daly days! I can still hear her saying to Jimmie Lewis, 'I'll see you later.' Age set no limit on Mrs. Gilbert. And so it is with other women of the stage. A sense of humor is born in you and it carries you along as long as you live. It saves you from going mad. Speaking personally, on Monday night it saved me from failure."

Two windows were open, so Miss Irwin's sigh escaped easily to the outer air.

"It was all well enough for you boys in front to say 'Jolly May Irwin' to yourselves," she gasped, "but if you could have read my thoughts you might have written another story. The truth is I was down in my boots—but high-heeled slippers have their saving grace. Here's how I stood when the curtain went up: That afternoon my brother had been stricken with illness and I was so sick that I could hardly get the words of the play out of my throat. But I fooled you all—you critics don't know how easy you are!"

She threw herself back to enjoy a laugh, in which I gladly joined. The fact is that May Irwin has no better friends in New York than the devoted slaves who turn her welcome performances into "copy."

"Don't think for a moment," she hastened to say, "that the laugh's on you boys. Heaven forbid! I know my friends, and I don't forget them. You can put that in your hat and wear it out with you. But I'm giving you inside information when I tell you that I felt anything but jolly on Monday night. For one thing, my cold had gone from my throat to my chest, and, as my doctor said, that's going a long way with me."

The joke was on the chest—and Miss Irwin made no bones about it. She was coughing better as she continued:

"My sense of humor is keener to-day than it ever was. And I owe it all to a drop of of Scotch in my veins. My mother is Scotch-Canadian, and although she's eighty-one she doesn't look a day over fifty. Her sense of humor keeps her young. And that's true of every woman who looks upon life with a twinkle in her eye. Any time you hear any one say that women haven't a sense of humor don't you believe it! I'd rather play to an audience of women than of men any time, and still they tell me I know men pretty well. For that matter I flatter myself that I know how to make men laugh. And this brings us to the beginning and end of this happy meeting. No woman outlives her sense of humor. It sticks to her as long as she can stick to earth. All she needs is a chance to express it."

I was only too willing to let her talk. It isn't every afternoon that a hard-working man meets a May Irwin. Life, after all, resolves itself pretty much into communication with the subway, where your neighbor's newspaper is stuck in your eye. It was a relief to hear:

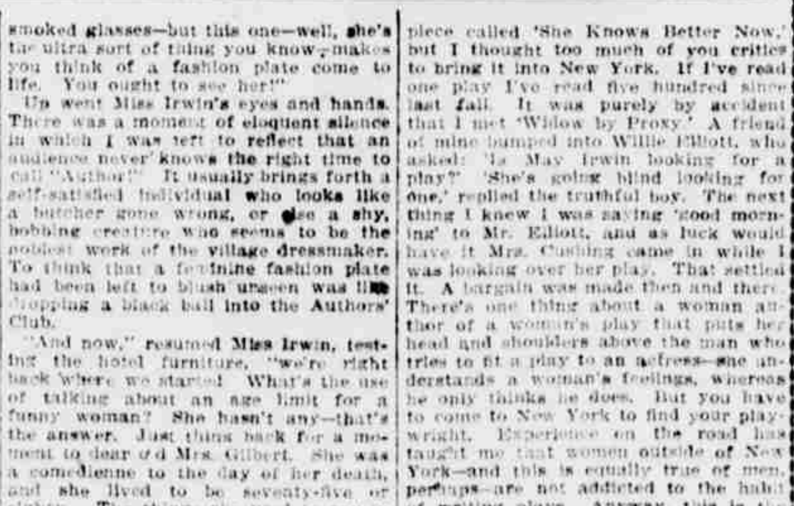
"Why not make the most of a laugh when you hear it? Last year I had a piece called 'She Knows Better Now,' but I thought too much of you critics to bring it into New York. If I've read one play I've read five hundred since last fall. It was purely by accident that I met 'Widow by Proxy.' A friend of mine bumped into Willie Elliott, who asked: 'Is May Irwin looking for a play?' 'She's going blind looking for one,' replied the truthful boy. The next thing I knew I was saying 'good morning' to Mr. Elliott, and as luck would have it Mrs. Cushing came in while I was looking over her play. That settled it. A bargain was made then and there. There's one thing about a woman author of a woman's play that puts her head and shoulders above the man who tries to fit a play to an actress—she understands a woman's feelings, whereas he only thinks he does. But you have to come to New York to find your playwright. Experience on the road has taught me that women outside of New York—and this is equally true of men, perhaps—are not addicted to the habit of writing plays. Anyway, this is the market and here you'll find the play, if it's to be found anywhere."

"You are a suffragist?" I asked in fear and trembling.

"Well—not exactly. I don't like the word."

"How does it sound to you?"

"I'd hate to tell you. But aren't we having nice weather for this time of year? It sends all my thoughts back to the farm. The members of my company tell me over the tea we save from the play for my dressing room that they won't feel safe about a two weeks' notice until they give me a mask in which to cross Broadway. They're afraid I'll hear a bird chirping or see a blade of grass in Long Acre and feel the call of spring. And speaking of spring, don't forget the eternal sense of humor. No, that isn't the door to the hall, that's the bathroom. This way out!"

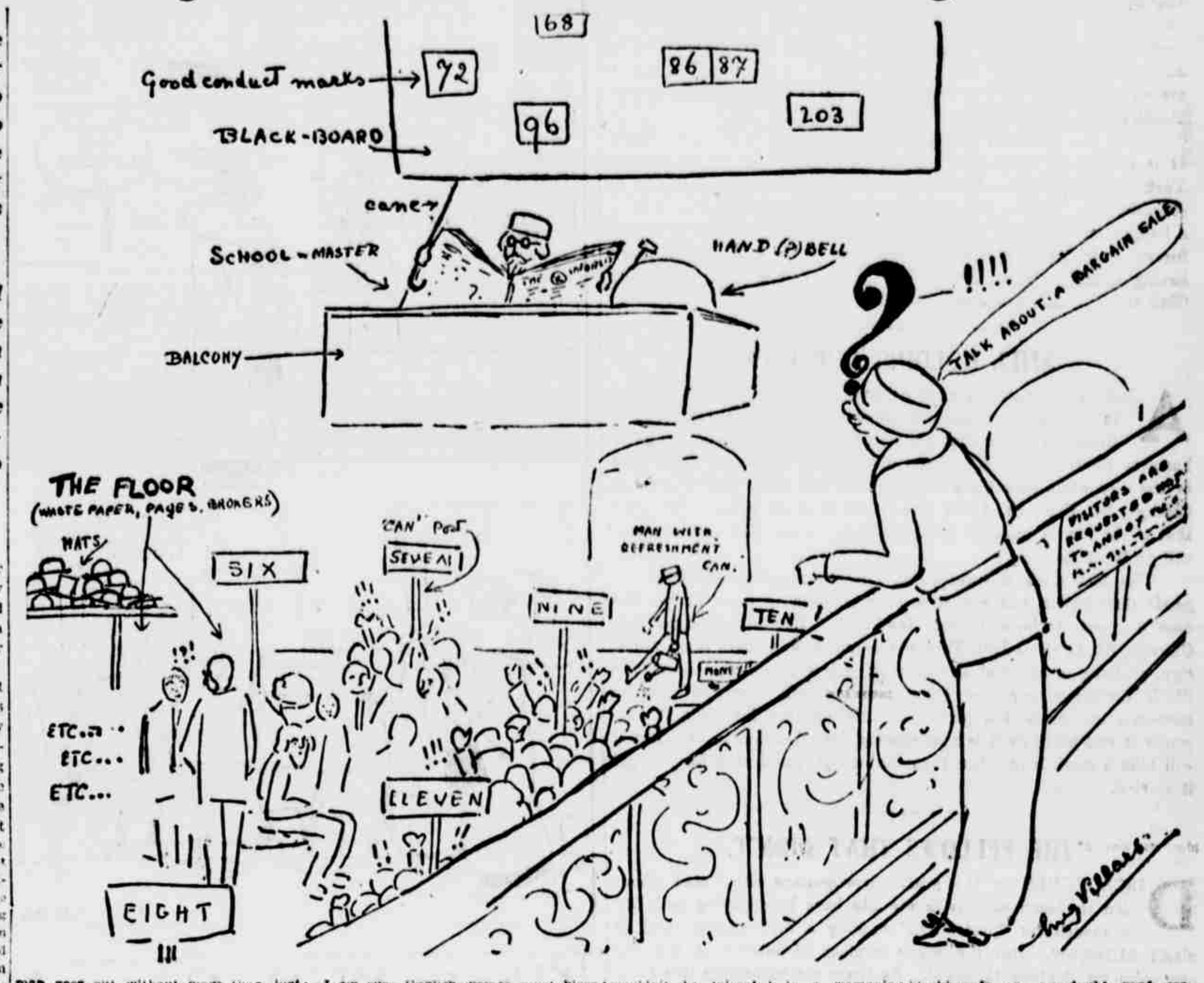


SHE NEEDS A MASK TO CROSS BROADWAY.

Meg Villars Sees the New York Stock Exchange and Wonders Why Wives Are Teased About Bargain Sales

She Notices That There Is Always on the Floor a Loan Broker Who Will Lend Money to the Members on the Spot When They Want to Buy Stocks and Things.

Her Notion Is It Would Be a Good Idea for the Stores to Have a Man on Hand to Lend Cash to Women Who Leave Home With Only Carfare When They Go Shopping.



BY MEG VILLARS.

AFTER a woman sees your Stock Exchange, dear New York, she just sits down and wonders how on earth you men creatures have the nerve to joke her about Bargain sales!!!

Why, the Stock Exchange is just like a big bargain sale, but not as pretty because your ribbons are only long bits of white tape with mysterious hieroglyphics printed along them! Now, a woman would have made those tape machines combine pleasure with business! If you must have stock quotations (is that the right way to say it?), have them; but why not have a nice serial story running on the underside to amuse the members who don't seem to be taking any active part in the scramble? I'm not sure that a woman wouldn't find the way to make that machine turn out sausages, too; it would solve the

high cost of living worry as well as providing quick luncheons on the spot.

I suppose the members who walk about with their hands in their pockets, or else sit round the "can" posts, are the wise ones who got to the shop early and made their bargains before the suburban crowd rushed along; then afterward they just stay there to watch the fun a bit, and, like a woman does, step to the counter from time to time to snatch an unusually tempting bargain away from under a slower member's nose!

I dare say buying shares and things is like buying gloves. You get them cheaper if you take them in dozens! Therefore the richer you are the more you get, and then you make corners in things. (I say, I'd like to make a corner in Parry's frocks and Revellion's furs!)

There's one thing where you New York men beat us women, and that is in the money lending line. When we haven't any money to buy bargains with we just have to weepingly take the train home, empty handed, or else have it charged to husband—and we don't really dare do that as often as husbands pretend. At the Stock Exchange you seem to have people to lend you money right there on the spot. One lender was pointed out to me. A tall, thinnish man, with narrow shoulders, walking about with his hands clasped behind him. I think that's a really great idea, and they ought to have a man like that in some of the New York stores.

MONEY-LENDER PROBABLY A WOMAN-HATER.

I'm afraid that particular one was a woman-hater, though, because he simply wouldn't pay any attention to me. I waved to him, quite nicely, meaning to ask him to step up to the balcony, where I was, and arrange for a loan, but he turned the cold shoulder absolutely. Nasty thing!

It made me mad, because I went out that morning without any money in my purse, and down Wall street way I saw quite lots of things I'd have loved to buy.

It's always like that. When a woman goes out without more than just her omnibus fare she always comes across little shops that have the most attractive things. There are lovely stationers' stores and haberdashery shops downtown. If there are two things that attract me it's stationery and ties! In London I can never go down to the City without spending a good many shillings on masculine neckwear and fancy notepaper, not forgetting pretty colored sealing wax. It's the same thing in Paris round the Bourse. Paris is different from London and New York in one respect, though, because in the streets near its Stock Exchange there dwell all the wholesale silk and satin houses, as well as embroidery and trimming merchants, and there are, therefore, almost as many women and girls round the Bourse as there are men. You don't see many women downtown here or in London. But at the same time, in all three cities, the shopping atmosphere in the men's part of the town is the same. Shirt sleeves and bengals!

SHE OVERLOOKS THE PUSH CART BRIGADE.

In London you can't walk down Lombard street without treading on the gutter merchants. It seems to be missing here, or is it that you don't have hawkers at all? At home they deal in India rubber bands, in clips to hold your shirt sleeves up, in leather cases for your fountain-pen, in pencils, penknives, shoe laces, safety pins, collar buttons and all sorts of little stubs that come in handy.

I am sure English women must bless those gutter merchants, for their husbands have no excuse to forget to buy their collar buttons from them! Have you noticed, dear New York men, that a woman simply can't remember to buy collar buttons for her wusser-half? It's a fact. She'll get him anything from a safety razor to suspenders; she'll even try matching a box of cigars from an old stub; BUT she will not recall the fact that what he wants most is a card of collar buttons!

Talking of stock exchanges, however, it's in Paris that you get the best view of the funny way men do business.

You can set out under the awnings of any one of the many little cafes that abound on the Place de la Bourse and watch them tumbling up and down the steep steps of the Bourse across the street, yelling like madmen and gesticulating like monkeys (you do the yelling part here, all right, too, don't you?). On a spring day it's a particularly pleasant way of spending an hour in the forenoon. The poor wretches are hot and dusty, their collars are fast samples of uncommon position, and there you sit under your cool awning, feeling comfy and happy and oh! so vastly superior to the mere male creature who has been getting into a perfectly full dress state over a few shares and things that generally have such outlandish names!

To return to your own pet particular Stock Exchange, dear New York, I am afraid you are rather untidy, you men. The way you tear up your shopping list and scatter the paper about on the floor wouldn't be tolerated in a woman's store. By the way, I don't see why you are so proud of that floor, either!

I'm sure it isn't much to boast about any way, just plain wood, not even polished; in some of our stores we have lovely parquetry work; and at any rate it's always waxed and clean looking, we are not obliged to have men going around with watering pots to lay the dust as you do! And then the way you throw your hats around! Don't you ever lose them? You wouldn't find women taking off their hats and leaving them about promiscuously like that! When a visitor sees the Stock Exchange, as viewed from the gallery, it looks more like a second hand hat shop than anything else. Hats on the ledges about the telephone booths, hats on the railings where the bond brokers (is that right?) have a little platform to themselves, hats piled anywhere and everywhere, all over the kitchen floor, so to speak.

Perhaps I have been thinking wrongly all the time! Perhaps the Stock Exchange isn't a store at all? Now I think about it further maybe that it's more of a school of mental arithmetic. That would account for the huge blackboards they have on the walls and the nice schoolmaster-looking old gentleman up in the gallery who keeps order!

Why, yes, that's it, now I understand the meaning of the sharp cries and yelps one hears from time to time! It's quite easy once you set your brain to work and get the hang of it! Those numbers that keep coming . . on the blackboards are no doubt good conduct marks for the right solutions to the sums the clever floor boys have done in their heads! The ones who are walking about doing nothing are the senior and extra-intelligent pupils who got their problems done early, then they hang around, manlike, to see the laggards get into trouble and gloat over them!! It took me some time to grasp the idea! I'm ashamed to say, but now I've got it I'll hang on to it! Now I understand about the bunch of cross, worried looking men outside on the curb below roped in together under the surveillance of an officer! I guess they were the very badly behaved ones of the bunch and they got sent out of the class as a punishment! They were lucky it wasn't raining!! Some of them looked awfully mad about it and were making all sorts of menacing gestures up at the windows; if I were the nice old schoolmaster in the skullcap I should worry. Other members of the curb crowd were quite nice and quiet and were working out their problems in their pocketbooks with a certain dignified patience it did one good to see! I guess they'll get forgiven and be taken back if they persevere!

I was very, very interested in it all, dear New York, and I think the great buildings and marble palaces with all the elevators down town are wonderful. If I have made many mistakes in the way I have understood your great Stock Exchange, you will forgive me, won't you?—because, after all I'm only a poor, ignorant, Anglo-French heathen!