

The Wasp
May 1, 1886

The Devil's Dictionary

LAST, *n.* A shoemaker's implement, named by a frowning Providence for our sins. It has been calculated that the sum of misery suffered by the accident of this thing's name, equals that resulting from seven long wars and a general pestilence; and the punsters are still unsated.

O punster, would my lot were cast
Where cobblers are unknown,
So that I might forget their last,
And hear your own.

LATITUDINARIAN, *n.* In Theology, a miscreant who does his thinking at home instead of putting it out. He is regarded by the priesthood and clergy with the same aversion that a barber feels for the man who shaves himself.

LAUGHTER, *n.* An interior convulsion, producing a distortion of the features and accompanied by inarticulate noises. It is infectious and, though intermittent, incurable. Liability to attacks of laughter is one of the characteristics distinguishing man from the animals—these being not only inaccessible to the provocation of his example, but impregnable to the microbes having original jurisdiction in bestowal of the disease. Whether laughter could be imparted to animals by inoculation with *sputa* from a human patient is a question that has not been determined by experiment, but valuable work in that direction may be looked for soon, the Austro-Hungarian Government having appropriated a large sum for the purpose. It is held by the learned and ingenious Dr. Trahigh, sometime physician in ordinary to the late Ahkoond of Swat, that the infectious character of laughter is wholly due to instantaneous fermentation of sputa diffused in spray. From this peculiarity he named the disorder *Twisteriasis broadcasta*.

LAUREL, *n.* The *laurus*, a vegetable dedicated to Apollo, and formerly defoliated to wreath the brows of victors and such poets as had influence at court.

LAUREATE, *adj.* Crowned with the leaves of the vegetable aforesaid. In England the "Poet Laureate" is an officer of the Queen's household who acts as dancing skeleton at every royal feast and singing mute at every royal funeral. The post is now held by the remains of Tennyson, but of all the incumbents the late Bob Southey had the most notable knack at drugging the Samson of public joy and cutting his hair to the quick; and he had an artistic color-sense which enabled him so to blacken a public grief as to give it the aspect of a national crime. Our Californian Poet Laureate is Mr. Adair Welcker, the Shakespeare of Rabel's Tannery, a literary artist of such consummate skill that he can express a whole emotionette on the disk of a single millstone—and a Sacramento gentleman who, with a suicidal intention, was wearing one on his neck had the forethought to get him to do it.

LAW, *n.*

Once Law was sitting on the bench,
And Mercy knelt a-weeping.
“Clear out!” he cried, “disordered wench!
Nor come before me creeping.
Upon your knees if you appear,
’Tis plain you have no standing here.”

Then Justice came. His Honor cried:
“Your status?—devil seize you!”
“*Amicus curiae*,” she replied—
“Friend of the court, so please you.”
“Get out,” he shouted—“there’s the door!—
I never saw your face before!”

(Source: Archive.org, <https://archive.org/stream/waspjanjune188616unse#page/n342/mode/1up>)