

Niblo George

# Atchoo! Sneezes from a Hilarious Vaudevillian



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### Atchoo!

Fellow citizens! – I beg pardon, I mean ladies and gentlemen! You see I've just come from a political meeting, and that sort of thing gets on your nerves. I went to hear my friend Isaacstein talk. His subject was "Why should the Jew have to work?"

They did a lot of whitewashing at that meeting. I suppose it's all right. Of course you can't make a new fence with a pail of whitewash, but you can cover up the mothholes.

But we mustn't be too hard on the politicians. If it wasn't for politics a good many fellows that are too lazy to earn a living with their hands would be paupers. But some of 'em are all right. There's Isaacstein for instance. As good a man as ever sauntered down Hester Street. He joined the noble army of grafters two years ago and worked so hard at his profession that he got appendicitis.

A friend of Isaacstein's met another acquaintance of his in Hester Street and asked:

"Haf you heard about Isaacstein?"

"No. Vat iss it?"

"He vas sick. They take him by der hospital, and vat you tink they do to him?"

"Vell. Vell. Vat iss it?"

"They put him in a room all by himself und take his appendix away from him."

"Na! Na! Na! Vat a pity, ain't it, he didn't have it in his wife's name?"

Why, I was taken sick myself lately – such thing will happen even in the best regulated families, you know.

The doctor came and said that he  
Would make another man of me.  
"All right," said I, "and if you will,  
Just send that other man your bill."

While I was on my way here there was a fire down in one of those thickly populated streets where twenty families and more live, like sardines, in a tenement. The fire engine came booming along, and as usual created tremendous excitement.

I noticed a small chap on a bicycle riding zigzag in front of the machine, evidently anxious to keep up with it and get to the fire in time to watch it begin work.

Half a dozen times the driver had to pull up suddenly to avoid running over the nervy little Hebrew, and this of course made the firemen riding with the machine furious.

Just in front of where I was standing one of the gallant life savers jumped down from the engine, caught hold of the boy and pulled him off to one side, at the same time saying:

"You miserable little Sheeney, you ought to be arrested for getting in the way! I've a good mind to spank you."

The boy looked at the fireman in surprise and whimpered:

"If it wasn't for the Jews you wouldn't have anything to do."

I often squander an hour or two down in Hester Street, where I have some rare acquaintances among the second-hand dealers.

Of course you understand that I only go there to study human nature, and I remember some months ago being delightfully entertained at a Jewish wedding, where my esteemed friend Moses Schaumburg gave his cherished Rebecca into the keeping of young Silverstein, a progressive Broadway salesman.

This fact was brought to my mind when, only the other day I saw the bridegroom rush into his father-in-law's establishment bearing a look of excitement, and also a few very positive scratches upon his olive face, and exclaiming dramatically:

"Mister Schaumburg, I wants you to dake back your daughter Rebecca."

The old man threw up his hands.

"I dakes not dot Repecca back. Ven a man comes to my house, picks out himself a piece of goots, and dot goots vas received by him in goot order, I would be a fool to dake pack dot goods. No, sir, you schoost keep dot Repecca."

My brother Tom was hit on the head some time ago, and at the hospital they said they would have to amputate half his brain. I didn't want them to, because he is absent-minded anyway.

"We'll have to give him something to make him sleep," said one of the surgeons.

"That won't be necessary," said another; "he's a policeman."

That made Tom sore, and he snapped: "I've got half a mind to cave in your ribs for you."

"You won't feel that way in a minute," said the surgeon, "because that's the half of your mind we're going to cut out."

It was a great operation. When I told my wife of the surgeon's little joke and how Tom came back at him she said she never knew a time when Tom wasn't ready to give anybody a piece of his mind.

Tom was a confirmed dyspeptic, too, and when the operator was taking an X-ray photograph of the seat of his troubles, this waggish brother of mine, with a ghastly attempt to be facetious, said:

"This, I suppose, is what might be called taking light exercise on an empty stomach."

Perhaps it may surprise you to hear me say that some years ago I was connected with the newspaper business.

I don't tell this to everybody, you know, but there are some little things connected with my experience that drive away the blues in these times when the ghost refuses to walk regularly on pay day.

It was out in old Kaintuck, the Blue Grass country famous for its fast horses, fair women and old Bourbon.

Say, have you ever been in the land of Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, the original Tennessee Congressmen?

You don't know what you've missed then – grand scenery, splendid cooking, and the most original people in the mountains, where they make that moonshine whiskey you've heard about.

I used to hustle right lively looking for news, and during the course of my journeyings I ran across a grizzled old farmer from the back settlements, who looked like he might be a good judge of double distilled mountain dew that had paid no revenue to Uncle Sam.

Of course I tackled him right away, and first lining him up in the tap-room of the tavern, asked what news there might be up in his section, for it was a warm corner of the State, and could usually be depended on for some lively incidents during the week.

His answer rather disappointed me at first.

"They ain't nothin' doin' up our way," he said, "'cause we're all too busy with our crops to bother about anything else. All quiet in our neighborhood for sartin."

"Pretty good crops this year?" I inquired.

"Bully," says he. "I ought to be in my field this minute, an' I would be if I hadn't come to town to see the coroner."

"The coroner?" I began to feel interested, because you know there's only one kind of harvest that needs a coroner.

"Yep. Want him to hold an inquest on a couple of fellers down in our neighborhood."

"Inquest? Was it an accident?"

"Nope. Zeke Burke did it a-puppus. Plugged George Rambo and his boy Bill with a pistol. Got to have an inquest."

"What caused the fight?"

"There wasn't no fight. Zeke never give the other fellers a show. Guess he was right, too, 'cause the Rambos didn't give Zeke's father an' brother any chance. Just hid behind a tree and fired at 'em as they came along the road. That was yistiday mornin', an' in an hour Zeke had squared accounts."

"Has Zeke been arrested?"

"Nope. What's the use? Some of old man Rambo's relatives came along last night, burned down Zeke's house, shot him an' his wife, an' set fire to his barn. Nope, Zeke hasn't been arrested. But I ain't got time to talk to you. Have to git back to my harvestin'. But there ain't no news down our way. If anythin' happens I'll let ye know."

One of my best friends down there was an old judge who knew more about whiskey than he did about law. One day a young lawyer came to town and hung up his shingle.

Up to that day the judge had been the only member of the legal fraternity there.

Old Si Corntassle, a close-fisted farmer, sizing up the situation, thought it a good chance to corner some legal advice without cost, so he hastened to call upon the young man, told him he was very glad he had come into the town, as the old judge was getting superannuated, and then contrived in a sort of neighborly talk to get some legal questions answered.

Then thanking the young sprig of the bar, he put on his hat and was about to leave, when the lawyer asked him if he should charge the advice, for which the fee was five dollars.

The old fellow went into a violent passion and swore he never would pay, but the young lawyer told him he would sue him if he didn't.

So old Si trotted down to see the judge, found him hoeing in his garden, and said:

"That young scamp that's just come into town! I dropped in to make a neighborly call on him and he charged me five dollars for legal advice."

"Served you right," said the judge, who sized up the situation, and saw a chance to pay off an old score; "you had no business to have gone to him."

"But have I got to pay it, judge?"

"Of course you have."

"Well, then," said the man, "I suppose I must," and he started off.

"Hold on!" said the judge; "aren't you going to pay me?"

"Pay you? What for?" said old Si.

"For legal advice."

"What do you charge?"

"Ten dollars."

And consequently as old Si had to settle with both he rather overreached himself in the transaction.

Some of you people doubtless find benefit in visiting the country, but I imagine Snellbaker, who has a gents' furnishing-goods emporium on the corner of a Brooklyn Street, rather carries off the prize in a profitable trip.

I met him the other day, well sunburned, and with a twinkle in his eye.

"I say, Mr. Niblo, did you hear about my luck?" he asked, slapping me on the shoulder.

"Why, no, what's happened now?" I replied, wondering if he had drawn the grand prize in a lottery, or if his children had the measles.

"Well, you know when I went away to the country, I only took my five children and I brought ten home with me."

"How was that?" I asked, in surprise.

"Well, they ate green apples and got doubled up."

Singular what queer things do happen on the electric cars of a great metropolis. The other day I was riding down to the City Hall in a pretty crowded car when something happened.

All the other passengers in the car were men except one; and she was a girl, a nice, pretty, young thing of that peculiar pinkish clarity of complexion more commonly designated "peaches and cream."

The conductor had just collected her fare and was proceeding on his way to the rear platform when the girl grabbed at the left arm of her jacket and emitted a gaspy little scream.

"What is it, miss?" asked the conductor.

"Oh, what shall I do?" moaned the girl. "I've lost it! I've lost my Yale pin!"

And she looked as if she would topple over on the man next to her. The conductor stooped and looked about the floor of the car. All of us passengers did the same. The pretty young thing shook out her skirts vigorously. All hands lent their aid to lift up the gratings and to search the space beneath them. There was, however, no signs of the cherished emblem. About the time everybody was beginning to feel exhausted the girl suddenly exclaimed:

"Oh, I remember now! It's all right. Don't bother any more. I gave it back last night."

"City Hall!" yelled the conductor, and I was glad to get off.

Last time I rode in a trolley car I got a scare for sure. Honestly now, it gave me a queer feeling up and down my spine when I noticed that the car number was 1313, and what made it worse we were just passing Thirteenth Street at the time.

I thought I would mention the fact to the conductor, especially when upon counting the passengers I found there were just that fatal number aboard.

It was the thirteenth of the month too, and bless you if that conductor's number wasn't just 3913.

So I grimly paraded these significant facts before the attention of the knight of the fare register.

"I should think it would make you nervous!" I remarked.

"Only once't that I remember," said the conductor, with a grin.

"When and how?"

"There was thirteen babies in this here car yellin' in thirteen different keys all at the same time," replied the conductor.

Some people are so superstitious, you know, always carrying home old horseshoes and nailing them up over the door – why, a pagan nation like the Japanese have the same custom with other embellishments.

The fun of it is, while some stoutly maintain the horseshoe must be nailed with the forks pointing upward, there are others just as set in their belief that if a chap wants real good luck to swoop down upon his domicile it is absolutely imperative that the opening must be left below.

Why Ketcham actually grew hot under the collar the other day because I sneered when he chanced to mention what horrible bad fortune had come to him since his propitiation to the gods was stolen from his barn door by a wandering dago junk-man.

"Don't you believe then that there's good luck in finding a horseshoe?" he demanded, fiercely.

"Why, yes, under certain conditions," I replied; "for instance when you find it on the winning horse."

Ketcham is quite a gay fellow, and a member of many clubs, so that he can seldom be found home of an evening.

I once remonstrated with him, as a true friend should.

"See here," I said, seriously, "you are out every night until the 'wee sma' hours.' Isn't midnight late enough for you?"

"Well," he replied, "I find when I show up at midnight my wife can talk to me, but when I get home at three, words fail her."

Say, my wife came home from shopping the other day filled with righteous indignation, and, of course, while men are not supposed to have any curiosity, you know, my peace of mind was somewhat disturbed.

I began to have vague fears that perhaps some miserable detective in one of the department stores might have insulted her – perhaps accused her of having too warm an affection for the lace counter.

At length, however, seeing that I would not ask the question she was burning to hear, she burst out with:

"I wish the shopkeepers would be more careful how they put mirrors in conspicuous places."

"What's the matter? Been trying to dodge your own reflection?" I asked, for do you know it was the first time I had ever heard a woman complain of too much looking-glass.

"No; but you know there is one of those triple mirrors in one of the department stores, and poor dear Fido spent fifteen minutes chasing around it trying to find the other dog. I thought I'd never get him out of that store."

Ever been through the Chinese quarter down around Mott Street, where you can smell the incense of the joss-sticks burning before the ugly little idols?

I saw in the paper the other day about a fellow who had come from Korea with samples of idols that he wanted an American firm to manufacture, and it begins to look as though presently our enterprising Yankees might corral this trade along with everything else.

That gave me an inspiration which I set down in verse – if you'd like to hear the result I don't mind one bit, so prepare to weep, for here it goes:

The heathen in his blindness  
Bows down to wood and stone —  
Some idol inexpensive  
He puts upon a throne;  
But now we'll teach the heathen  
The error of his way,  
And sell him modern idols  
Made in the U. S. A.

We'll lift the foolish heathen  
From groping in the dust.  
And change and civilize him —  
We'll form an Idol Trust.  
For ages he has groveled  
In superstition dim  
But now we'll help his progress  
By making gods for him.

No seven-handed figures;  
No gods with coiling tails:  
No birds, no bugs, no serpents,  
No animals, nor whales —  
No, sir! He'll have our idols:  
A shovelful of coal,  
A meter, and an oil can  
To terrify his soul.

A bonnet and a ribbon:  
A bargain ad. – the strife  
They'll cause will make the heathen

Yearn for a better life.  
The poor benighted pagan  
Will come out of the dark  
And bow before our idol —  
The mighty dollar mark!

Mr. Carboline, our druggist at the corner, has troubles of his own, though I never realized the fact until I saw a perspiring individual rush in upon him with a thermometer in his hand the other day, and in an excited tone exclaim:

"Here, take back this darned machine before I freeze to death."

He looked so heated just then that we began to imagine he must be a little out of his mind, but Carboline ventured to ask humbly enough what was the matter with the mercury register.

"It's out of whack somehow, and won't register correctly. Darn it, I've been shivering in my room for a week, and just couldn't keep warm. I had the thermometer over my writing desk, and the other morning when the steam went down a little I looked at the mercury. It showed forty degrees.

"I knew nothing less than a polar bear could work in that temperature, and went hustling after the janitor.

"He shook up his furnace, and the steam began to sizzle, but the room wouldn't get warm enough to raise that mercury above 50.

"We ran short of coal for a day, and she went down to 40 again, and I went over to stop with a friend till we got more coal.

"Then the steam sizzled once more, but the north wind seemed to come in through the window cracks and the shivers had me all over.

"I struck for window strips, and had a row with the landlord.

"The mercury showed 50 degrees right along, and though I made it hot for the janitor I couldn't get any of it into the blamed thermometer.

"Yesterday I gave notice that I would get out if they didn't keep me warm. I'm a bachelor tenant paying a good price and generally no kicker, and they didn't want me to leave.

"About an hour ago the janitor came in to see how I was getting along.

"He found me at my desk with a blanket around me. He asked if I were sick. I told him I was frozen.

"He said he thought the room was very warm. Before licking him I showed him the thermometer and told him that was the real test.

"The mercury stood at 50.

"The janitor swore and went out.

"He came back in a minute with another thermometer and hung it alongside of mine. It was a fine one, guaranteed to keep perfect records.

"It marked 65 degrees when he brought it in, and in a minute or two it showed 71. Mine stood still at 50.

"The janitor looked at the two machines and began to grin. I began to unwind the blanket that was around me. The janitor looked scared, but I told him not to run; that I wasn't going to lick him. The only man that I felt like licking was the one who sold me a thermometer that wouldn't go.

"You're the one.

"Now, it's up to you to apologize, give me a machine that is true, or be licked. I've paid my money and you can take your choice."

Mr. Carboline preferred to make the change.

By the way, before I forget it, let me tell you about young Charlie Sultz, a friend of mine, who is really as modest a chap as you would care to meet.

Charlie has a girl upon whom he calls very frequently, and, they tell me, at the most unexpected times.

That was probably how it happened he dropped in one afternoon and was informed by her mother that she was upstairs taking a bath, so he told the old lady he only wanted to speak to her for a minute; and she called out:

"Mamie, come right down, Mr. Suitz wants to see you down here."

So Mamie called back, "Oh, mother, I can't; I have nothing on."

"Well, slip on something right away, and come down."

And what do you think? Mamie slipped on the stairs, and came down.

Talking of your level-headed young Lochinvars of to-day, who use automobiles in their elopements instead of horses as in the old times, there was Charlie's brother who fell in love with the only daughter of old Squeezer, the richest skinflint in Stringtown, and was bound to have her, even if he had to resort to strategy.

"Oh, Bob," she whispered, sliding down into the outstretched arms of the lover who stood at the bottom of the ladder, "are you sure the coast is clear?"

"To a dead certainty," he replied, bitterly. "I succeeded in boring a hole in the water pipe. Your father has discovered it, and will keep his finger over the hole until the plumber arrives. Come!"

I dined at the Waldorf the other night, and somehow in the long list of courses found my mind wrestling with an item that had caught my eye in one of the yellow sheets, where a certain well-known doctor declared that the simple cooking of savage tribes was far superior to that of the present civilized races.

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