

The Best American Humorous Short Stories By Various

Alexander Jessup

The Best American Humorous Short Stories Alexander Jessup, 1920

The Best American Humorous Short Stories Alexander Jessup, 2021-08-19 The Best American Humorous Short Stories Alexander Jessup - A Different Kind of Humor The Best American Humorous Short Stories is a collection of 19th-century and early 20th-century stories written by the likes of Mark Twain, Edgar Allan Poe, George William Curtis, Bret Harte or O. Henry. These stories aren't humorous in the sense of our modern understanding, they present a different kind of humor like jokes about men who don't wear hats and ridiculous notions about the African-Americans and about women. This Collection Includes: INTRODUCTION Alexander Jessup THE LITTLE FRENCHMAN AND HIS WATER LOTS (1839) George Pope Morris THE ANGEL OF THE ODD (1844) Edgar Allan Poe THE SCHOOLMASTER'S PROGRESS (1844) Caroline M.S. Kirkland THE WATKINSON EVENING (1846) Eliza Leslie TITBOTTOM'S SPECTACLES (1854) George William Curtis MY DOUBLE; AND HOW HE UNDOED ME (1859) Edward Everett Hale A VISIT TO THE ASYLUM FOR AGED AND DECAYED PUNSTERS (1861) Oliver Wendell Holmes THE CELEBRATED JUMPING FROG OF CALAVERAS COUNTY (1865) Mark Twain ELDER BROWN'S BACKSLIDE (1885) Harry Stillwell Edwards THE HOTEL EXPERIENCE OF MR. PINK FLUKER (1886) Richard Malcolm Johnston THE NICE PEOPLE (1890) Henry Cuyler Bunner THE BULLER-PODINGTON COMPACT (1897) Frank Richard Stockton COLONEL STARBOTTLE FOR THE PLAINTIFF (1901) Bret Harte THE DUPLICITY OF HARGRAVES (1902) O. Henry BARGAIN DAY AT TUTT HOUSE (1905) George Randolph Chester A CALL (1906) Grace MacGowan Cooke HOW THE WIDOW

WON THE DEACON (1911) William James Lampton GIDEON (1914) Wells Hastings

The Best American Humorous Short Stories Various, 2023-07-24 This volume does not aim to contain all “the best American humorous short stories”; there are many other stories equally as good, I suppose, in much the same vein, scattered through the range of American literature. I have tried to keep a certain unity of aim and impression in selecting these stories. In the first place I determined that the pieces of brief fiction which I included must first of all be not merely good stories, but good short stories. I put myself in the position of one who was about to select the best short stories in the whole range of American literature, but who, just before he started to do this, was notified that he must refrain from selecting any of the best American short stories that did not contain the element of humor to a marked degree. But I have kept in mind the wide boundaries of the term humor, and also the fact that the humorous standard should be kept second — although a close second — to the short story standard. In view of the necessary limitations as to the volume’s size, I could not hope to represent all periods of American literature adequately, nor was this necessary in order to give examples of the best that has been done in the short story in a humorous vein in American literature. Probably all types of the short story of humor are included here, at any rate. Not only copyright restrictions but in a measure my own opinion have combined to exclude anything by Joel Chandler Harris — Uncle Remus — from the collection. Harris is primarily — in his best work — a humorist, and only secondarily a short story writer. As a humorist he is of the first rank; as a writer of short stories his place is hardly so high. His humor is not mere funniness and diversion; he is a humorist in the fundamental and large sense, as are Cervantes, Rabelais, and Mark

Twain. No book is duller than a book of jokes, for what is refreshing in small doses becomes nauseating when perused in large assignments. Humor in literature is at its best not when served merely by itself but when presented along with other ingredients of literary force in order to give a wide representation of life. Therefore "professional literary humorists," as they may be called, have not been much considered in making up this collection. In the history of American humor there are three names which stand out more prominently than all others before Mark Twain, who, however, also belongs to a wider classification: "Josh Billings" (Henry Wheeler Shaw, 1815-1885), "Petroleum V. Nasby" (David Ross Locke, 1833-1888), and "Artemus Ward" (Charles Farrar Browne, 1834-1867). In the history of American humor these names rank high; in the field of American literature and the American short story they do not rank so high. I have found nothing of theirs that was first-class both as humor and as short story. Perhaps just below these three should be mentioned George Horatio Derby (1823-1861), author of *Phoenixiana* (1855) and the *Squibob Papers* (1859), who wrote under the name "John Phoenix." As has been justly said, "Derby, Shaw, Locke and Browne carried to an extreme numerous tricks already invented by earlier American humorists, particularly the tricks of gigantic exaggeration and calm-faced mendacity, but they are plainly in the main channel of American humor, which had its origin in the first comments of settlers upon the conditions of the frontier, long drew its principal inspiration from the differences between that frontier and the more settled and compact regions of the country, and reached its highest development in Mark Twain, in his youth a child of the American frontier, admirer and imitator of Derby and Browne, and eventually a man of the world and one of its

greatest humorists." Nor have such later writers who were essentially humorists as "Bill Nye" (Edgar Wilson Nye, 1850-1896) been considered, because their work does not attain the literary standard and the short story standard as creditably as it does the humorous one. When we come to the close of the nineteenth century the work of such men as "Mr. Dooley" (Finley Peter Dunne, 1867-) and George Ade (1866-) stands out. But while these two writers successfully conform to the exacting critical requirements of good humor and — especially the former — of good literature, neither — though Ade more so — attains to the greatest excellence of the short story. Mr. Dooley of the Archey Road is essentially a wholesome and wide-poised humorous philosopher, and the author of *Fables in Slang* is chiefly a satirist, whether in fable, play or what not. This volume might well have started with something by Washington Irving, I suppose many critics would say. It does not seem to me, however, that Irving's best short stories, such as *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and *Rip Van Winkle*, are essentially humorous stories, although they are o'erspread with the genial light of reminiscence. It is the armchair geniality of the eighteenth century essayists, a constituent of the author rather than of his material and product. Irving's best humorous creations, indeed, are scarcely short stories at all, but rather essaylike sketches, or sketchlike essays. James Lawson (1799-1880) in his *Tales and Sketches*: by a Cosmopolite (1830), notably in *The Dapper Gentleman's Story*, is also plainly a follower of Irving. We come to a different vein in the work of such writers as William Tappan Thompson (1812-1882), author of the amusing stories in letter form, *Major Jones's Courtship* (1840); Johnson Jones Hooper (1815-1862), author of *Widow Rugby's Husband*, and *Other Tales of Alabama* (1851); Joseph G. Baldwin (1815-1864), who wrote *The Flush*

Times of Alabama and Mississippi (1853); and Augustus Baldwin Longstreet (1790-1870), whose Georgia Scenes (1835) are as important in "local color" as they are racy in humor. Yet none of these writers yield the excellent short story which is also a good piece of humorous literature. But they opened the way for the work of later writers who did attain these combined excellences. The sentimental vein of the midcentury is seen in the work of Seba Smith (1792-1868), Eliza Leslie (1787-1858), Frances Miriam Whitcher ("Widow Bedott," 1811-1852), Mary W. Janvrin (1830-1870), and Alice Bradley Haven Neal (1828-1863). The well-known work of Joseph Clay Neal (1807-1847) is so all pervaded with caricature and humor that it belongs with the work of the professional humorist school rather than with the short story writers. To mention his Charcoal Sketches, or Scenes in a Metropolis (1837-1849) must suffice. The work of Seba Smith is sufficiently expressed in his title, Way Down East, or Portraits of Yankee Life (1854), although his Letters of Major Jack Downing (1833) is better known. Of his single stories may be mentioned The General Court and Jane Andrews' Firkin of Butter (October, 1847, Graham's Magazine). The work of Frances Miriam Whitcher ("Widow Bedott") is of somewhat finer grain, both as humor and in other literary qualities. Her stories or sketches, such as Aunt Magwire's Account of Parson Scrantum's Donation Party (March, 1848, Godey's Lady's Book) and Aunt Magwire's Account of the Mission to Muffletegawmy (July, 1859, Godey's), were afterwards collected in The Widow Bedott Papers (1855-56-80). The scope of the work of Mary B. Haven is sufficiently suggested by her story, Mrs. Bowen's Parlor and Spare Bedroom (February, 1860, Godey's), while the best stories of Mary W. Janvrin include The Foreign Count; or, High Art in Tattletown (October,

1860, Godey's) and City Relations; or, the Newmans' Summer at Clovernook (November, 1861, Godey's). The work of Alice Bradley Haven Neal is of somewhat similar texture. Her book, *The Gossips of Rivertown, with Sketches in Prose and Verse* (1850) indicates her field, as does the single title, *The Third-Class Hotel* (December, 1861, Godey's). Perhaps the most representative figure of this school is Eliza Leslie (1787-1858), who as "Miss Leslie" was one of the most frequent contributors to the magazines of the 1830's, 1840's and 1850's. One of her best stories is *The Watkinson Evening* (December, 1846, Godey's Lady's Book), included in the present volume; others are *The Batson Cottage* (November, 1846, Godey's Lady's Book) and *Juliet Irwin*; or, the *Carriage People* (June, 1847, Godey's Lady's Book). One of her chief collections of stories is *Pencil Sketches* (1833-1837). "Miss Leslie," wrote Edgar Allan Poe, "is celebrated for the homely naturalness of her stories and for the broad satire of her comic style." She was the editor of *The Gift* one of the best annuals of the time, and in that position perhaps exerted her chief influence on American literature. When one has read three or four representative stories by these seven authors one can grasp them all. Their titles as a rule strike the keynote. These writers, except "the Widow Bedott," are perhaps sentimentalists rather than humorists in intention, but read in the light of later days their apparent serious delineations of the frolics and foibles of their time take on a highly humorous aspect. George Pope Morris (1802-1864) was one of the founders of *The New York Mirror*, and for a time its editor. He is best known as the author of the poem, *Woodman, Spare That Tree*, and other poems and songs. *The Little Frenchman and His Water Lots* (1839), the first story in the present volume, is selected not because Morris was especially prominent in the field of the short story or humorous

prose but because of this single story's representative character. Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) follows with *The Angel of the Odd* (October, 1844, *Columbian Magazine*), perhaps the best of his humorous stories. *The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether* (November, 1845, *Graham's Magazine*) may be rated higher, but it is not essentially a humorous story. Rather it is incisive satire, with too biting an undercurrent to pass muster in the company of the genial in literature. Poe's humorous stories as a whole have tended to belittle rather than increase his fame, many of them verging on the inane. There are some, however, which are at least excellent fooling; few more than that. Probably this is hardly the place for an extended discussion of Poe, since the present volume covers neither American literature as a whole nor the American short story in general, and Poe is not a humorist in his more notable productions. Let it be said that Poe invented or perfected — more exactly, perfected his own invention of — the modern short story; that is his general and supreme achievement. He also stands superlative for the quality of three varieties of short stories, those of terror, beauty and ratiocination. In the first class belong *A Descent into the Maelstrom* (1841), *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1842), *The Black Cat* (1843), and *The Cask of Amontillado* (1846). In the realm of beauty his notable productions are *The Assignment* (1834), *Shadow: a Parable* (1835), *Ligeia* (1838), *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), *Eleonora* (1841), and *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842). The tales of ratiocination — what are now generally termed detective stories — include *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) and its sequel, *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* (1842-1843), *The Gold-Bug* (1843), *The Oblong Box* (1844), "*Thou Art the Man*" (1844), and *The Purloined Letter* (1844). Then, too, Poe was a master of style, one of the greatest

in English prose, possibly the greatest since De Quincey, and quite the most remarkable among American authors. Poe's influence on the short story form has been tremendous. Although the effects of structure may be astounding in their power or unexpectedness, yet the means by which these effects are brought about are purely mechanical. Any student of fiction can comprehend them, almost any practitioner of fiction with a bent toward form can fairly master them. The merit of any short story production depends on many other elements as well — the value of the structural element to the production as a whole depends first on the selection of the particular sort of structural scheme best suited to the story in hand, and secondly, on the way in which this is combined with the piece of writing to form a well-balanced whole. Style is more difficult to imitate than structure, but on the other hand the origin of structural influence is more difficult to trace than that of style. So while, in a general way, we feel that Poe's influence on structure in the short story has been great, it is difficult rather than obvious to trace particular instances. It is felt in the advance of the general level of short story art. There is nothing personal about structure — there is everything personal about style. Poe's style is both too much his own and too superlatively good to be successfully imitated — whom have we had who, even if he were a master of structural effects, could be a second Poe? Looking at the matter in another way, Poe's style is not his own at all. There is nothing "personal" about it in the petty sense of that term. Rather we feel that, in the case of this author, universality has been attained. It was Poe's good fortune to be himself in style, as often in content, on a plane of universal appeal. But in some general characteristics of his style his work can be, not perhaps imitated, but emulated. Greater vividness, deft impressionism, brevity that strikes

instantly to a telling effect — all these an author may have without imitating any one's style but rather imitating excellence. Poe's "imitators" who have amounted to anything have not tried to imitate him but to vie with him. They are striving after perfectionism. Of course the sort of good style in which Poe indulged is not the kind of style — or the varieties of style — suited for all purposes, but for the purposes to which it is adapted it may well be called supreme. Then as a poet his work is almost or quite as excellent in a somewhat more restricted range. In verse he is probably the best artist in American letters. Here his sole pursuit was beauty, both of form and thought; he is vivid and apt, intensely lyrical but without much range of thought. He has deep intuitions but no comprehensive grasp of life. His criticism is, on the whole, the least important part of his work. He had a few good and brilliant ideas which came at just the right time to make a stir in the world, and these his logical mind and telling style enabled him to present to the best advantage. As a critic he is neither broad-minded, learned, nor comprehensive. Nor is he, except in the few ideas referred to, deep. He is, however, limitedly original — perhaps intensely original within his narrow scope. But the excellences and limitations of Poe in any one part of his work were his limitations and excellences in all. As Poe's best short stories may be mentioned: Metzengerstein (Jan. 14, 1832, Philadelphia Saturday Courier), Ms. Found in a Bottle (October 19, 1833, Baltimore Saturday Visitor), The Assignment (January, 1834, Godey's Lady's Book), Berenice (March, 1835, Southern Literary Messenger), Morella (April, 1835, Southern Literary Messenger), The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall (June, 1835, Southern Literary Messenger), King Pest: a Tale Containing an Allegory (September, 1835, Southern Literary Messenger), Shadow: a

Parable (September, 1835, Southern Literary Messenger), Ligeia (September, 1838, American Museum), The Fall of the House of Usher (September, 1839, Burton's Gentleman's Magazine), William Wilson (1839: Gift for 1840), The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion (December, 1839, Burton's Gentleman's Magazine), The Murders in the Rue Morgue (April, 1841, Graham's Magazine), A Descent into the Maelstrom (May, 1841, Graham's Magazine), Eleonora (1841: Gift for 1842), The Masque of the Red Death (May, 1842, Graham's Magazine), The Pit and the Pendulum (1842: Gift for 1843), The Tell-Tale Heart (January, 1843, Pioneer), The Gold-Bug (June 21 and 28, 1843, Dollar Newspaper), The Black Cat (August 19, 1843, United States Saturday Post), The Oblong Box (September, 1844, Godey's Lady's Book), The Angel of the Odd (October, 1844, Columbian Magazine), "Thou Art the Man" (November, 1844, Godey's Lady's Book), The Purloined Letter (1844: Gift for 1845), The Imp of the Perverse (July, 1845, Graham's Magazine), The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether (November, 1845, Graham's Magazine), The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar (December, 1845, American Whig Review), The Cask of Amontillado (November, 1846, Godey's Lady's Book), and Lander's Cottage (June 9, 1849, Flag of Our Union). Poe's chief collections are: Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque (1840), Tales (1845), and The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe (1850-56). These titles have been dropped from recent editions of his works, however, and the stories brought together under the title Tales, or under subdivisions furnished by his editors, such as Tales of Ratiocination, etc. Caroline Matilda Stansbury Kirkland (1801-1864) wrote of the frontier life of the Middle West in the mid-nineteenth century. Her principal collection of short stories is Western Clearings (1845), from which The Schoolmaster's Progress, first

published in *The Gift* for 1845 (out in 1844), is taken. Other stories republished in that collection are *The Ball at Thram's Huddle* (April, 1840, *Knickerbocker Magazine*), *Recollections of the Land-Fever* (September, 1840, *Knickerbocker Magazine*), and *The Bee-Tree* (*The Gift* for 1842; out in 1841). Her description of the country schoolmaster, "a puppet cut out of shingle and jerked by a string," and the local color in general of this and other stories give her a leading place among the writers of her period who combined fidelity in delineating frontier life with sufficient fictional interest to make a pleasing whole of permanent value. George William Curtis (1824-1892) gained his chief fame as an essayist, and probably became best known from the department which he conducted, from 1853, as *The Editor's Easy Chair* for *Harper's Magazine* for many years. His volume, *Prue and I* (1856), contains many fictional elements, and a story from it, *Titbottom's Spectacles*, which first appeared in *Putnam's Monthly* for December, 1854, is given in this volume because it is a good humorous short story rather than because of its author's general eminence in this field. Other stories of his worth noting are *The Shrouded Portrait* (in *The Knickerbocker Gallery*, 1855) and *The Millennial Club* (November, 1858, *Knickerbocker Magazine*). Edward Everett Hale (1822-1909) is chiefly known as the author of the short story, *The Man Without a Country* (December, 1863, *Atlantic Monthly*), but his venture in the comic vein, *My Double*; and *How He Undid Me* (September, 1859, *Atlantic Monthly*), is equally worthy of appreciation. It was his first published story of importance. Other noteworthy stories of his are: *The Brick Moon* (October, November and December, 1869, *Atlantic Monthly*), *Life in the Brick Moon* (February, 1870, *Atlantic Monthly*), and *Susan's Escort* (May, 1890, *Harper's Magazine*). His chief volumes of short stories are: *The Man*

Without a Country, and Other Tales (1868); The Brick Moon, and Other Stories (1873); Crusoe in New York, and Other Tales (1880); and Susan's Escort, and Others (1897). The stories by Hale which have made his fame all show ability of no mean order; but they are characterized by invention and ingenuity rather than by suffusing imagination. There is not much homogeneity about Hale's work. Almost any two stories of his read as if they might have been written by different authors. For the time being perhaps this is an advantage — his stories charm by their novelty and individuality. In the long run, however, this proves rather a handicap. True individuality, in literature as in the other arts, consists not in "being different" on different occasions — in different works — so much as in being samely different from other writers; in being consistently one's self, rather than diffusedly various selves. This does not lessen the value of particular stories, of course. It merely injures Hale's fame as a whole. Perhaps some will chiefly feel not so much that his stories are different among themselves, but that they are not strongly anything — anybody's — in particular, that they lack strong personality. The pathway to fame is strewn with stray exhibitions of talent. Apart from his purely literary productions, Hale was one of the large moral forces of his time, through "uplift" both in speech and the written word. Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894), one of the leading wits of American literature, is not at all well known as a short story writer, nor did he write many brief pieces of fiction. His fame rests chiefly on his poems and on the Breakfast-Table books (1858-1860-1872-1890). Old Ironsides, The Last Leaf, The Chambered Nautilus and Homesick in Heaven are secure of places in the anthologies of the future, while his lighter verse has made him one of the leading American writers of "familiar verse." Frederick Locker-Lampson in the preface to

the first edition of his *Lyra Elegantiarum* (1867) declared that Holmes was “perhaps the best living writer of this species of verse.” His trenchant attack on Homeopathy and Its Kindred Delusions (1842) makes us wonder what would have been his attitude toward some of the beliefs of our own day; Christian Science, for example. He might have “exposed” it under some such title as *The Religio-Medical Masquerade*, or brought the batteries of his humor to bear on it in the manner of Robert Louis Stevenson’s fable, *Something In It*: “Perhaps there is not much in it, as I supposed; but there is something in it after all. Let me be thankful for that.” In Holmes’ long works of fiction, *Elsie Venner* (1861), *The Guardian Angel* (1867) and *A Mortal Antipathy* (1885), the method is still somewhat that of the essayist. I have found a short piece of fiction by him in the March, 1832, number of *The New England Magazine*, called *The Début*, signed O.W.H. *The Story of Iris in The Professor at the Breakfast Table*, which ran in *The Atlantic* throughout 1859, and *A Visit to the Asylum for Aged and Decayed Punsters* (January, 1861, *Atlantic*) are his only other brief fictions of which I am aware. The last named has been given place in the present selection because it is characteristic of a certain type and period of American humor, although its short story qualities are not particularly strong. Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835–1910), who achieved fame as “Mark Twain,” is only incidentally a short story writer, although he wrote many short pieces of fiction. His humorous quality, I mean, is so preponderant, that one hardly thinks of the form. Indeed, he is never very strong in fictional construction, and of the modern short story art he evidently knew or cared little. He is a humorist in the large sense, as are Rabelais and Cervantes, although he is also a humorist in various restricted applications of the word that are wholly American. The

Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County was his first publication of importance, and it saw the light in the Nov. 18, 1865, number of The Saturday Press. It was republished in the collection, The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, and Other Sketches, in 1867. Others of his best pieces of short fiction are: The Canvasser's Tale (December, 1876, Atlantic Monthly), The £1,000,000 Bank Note (January, 1893, Century Magazine), The Esquimaux Maiden's Romance (November, 1893, Cosmopolitan), Traveling with a Reformer (December, 1893, Cosmopolitan), The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg (December, 1899, Harper's), A Double-Barrelled Detective Story (January and February, 1902, Harper's) A Dog's Tale (December, 1903, Harper's), and Eve's Diary (December, 1905, Harper's). Among Twain's chief collections of short stories are: The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, and Other Sketches (1867); The Stolen White Elephant (1882), The £1,000,000 Bank Note (1893), and The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, and Other Stories and Sketches (1900). Harry Stillwell Edwards (1855-), a native of Georgia, together with Sarah Barnwell Elliott (? -) and Will N. Harben (1858-1919) have continued in the vein of that earlier writer, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet (1790-1870), author of Georgia Scenes (1835). Edwards' best work is to be found in his short stories of black and white life after the manner of Richard Malcolm Johnston. He has written several novels, but he is essentially a writer of human-nature sketches. "He is humorous and picturesque," says Fred Lewis Pattee, "and often he is for a moment the master of pathos, but he has added nothing new and nothing commandingly distinctive An exception to this might be made in favor of Elder Brown's Backslide (August, 1885, Harper's), a story in which all the elements are so nicely balanced that the result may well be called a

masterpiece of objective humor and pathos. Others of his short stories especially worthy of mention are: *Two Runaways* (July, 1886, *Century*), *Sister Todhunter's Heart* (July, 1887, *Century*), "*De Valley an' de Shadder*" (January, 1888, *Century*), *An Idyl of "Sinkin' Mount'in"* (October, 1888, *Century*), *The Rival Souls* (March, 1889, *Century*), *The Woodhaven Goat* (March, 1899, *Century*), and *The Shadow* (December, 1906, *Century*). His chief collections are *Two Runaways, and Other Stories* (1889) and *His Defense, and Other Stories* (1898). The most notable, however, of the group of short story writers of Georgia life is perhaps Richard Malcolm Johnston (1822-1898). He stands between Longstreet and the younger writers of Georgia life. His first book was *Georgia Sketches, by an Old Man* (1864). The *Goose Pond School*, a short story, had been written in 1857; it was not published, however, till it appeared in the November and December, 1869, numbers of a Southern magazine, *The New Eclectic*, over the pseudonym "Philemon Perch." His famous *Dukesborough Tales* (1871-1874) was largely a republication of the earlier book. Other noteworthy collections of his are: *Mr. Absalom Billingslea and Other Georgia Folk* (1888), *Mr. Fortner's Marital Claims, and Other Stories* (1892), and *Old Times in Middle Georgia* (1897). Among individual stories stand out: *The Organ-Grinder* (July, 1870, *New Eclectic*), *Mr. Neelus Peeler's Conditions* (June, 1879, *Scribner's Monthly*), *The Brief Embarrassment of Mr. Iverson Blount* (September, 1884, *Century*); *The Hotel Experience of Mr. Pink Fluker* (June, 1886, *Century*), republished in the present collection; *The Wimpy Adoptions* (February, 1887, *Century*), *The Experiments of Miss Sally Cash* (September, 1888, *Century*), and *Our Witch* (March, 1897, *Century*). Johnston must be ranked almost with Bret Harte as a pioneer in "local color" work, although his

work had little recognition until his Dukesborough Tales were republished by Harper & Brothers in 1883. Bret Harte (1839–1902) is mentioned here owing to the late date of his story included in this volume, Colonel Starbottle for the Plaintiff (March, 1901, Harper's), although his work as a whole of course belongs to an earlier period of our literature. It is now well-thumbed literary history that The Luck of Roaring Camp (August, 1868, Overland) and The Outcasts of Poker Flat (January, 1869, Overland) brought him a popularity that, in its suddenness and extent, had no precedent in American literature save in the case of Mrs. Stowe and Uncle Tom's Cabin. According to Harte's own statement, made in the retrospect of later years, he set out deliberately to add a new province to American literature. Although his work has been belittled because he has chosen exceptional and theatric happenings, yet his real strength came from his contact with Western life. Irving and Dickens and other models served only to teach him his art. "Finally," says Prof. Pattee, "Harte was the parent of the modern form of the short story. It was he who started Kipling and Cable and Thomas Nelson Page. Few indeed have surpassed him in the mechanics of this most difficult of arts. According to his own belief, the form is an American product ... Harte has described the genesis of his own art. It sprang from the Western humor and was developed by the circumstances that surrounded him. Many of his short stories are models. They contain not a superfluous word, they handle a single incident with graphic power, they close without moral or comment. The form came as a natural evolution from his limitations and powers. With him the story must of necessity be brief.... Bret Harte was the artist of impulse, the painter of single burning moments, the flashlight photographer who caught in lurid detail one dramatic episode in

the life of a man or a community and left the rest in darkness.” Harte’s humor is mostly “Western humor” There is not always uproarious merriment, but there is a constant background of humor. I know of no more amusing scene in American literature than that in the courtroom when the Colonel gives his version of the deacon’s method of signaling to the widow in Harte’s story included in the present volume, Colonel Starbottle for the Plaintiff. Here is part of it: True to the instructions she had received from him, her lips part in the musical utterance (the Colonel lowered his voice in a faint falsetto, presumably in fond imitation of his fair client) “Kerree!” Instantly the night becomes resonant with the impassioned reply (the Colonel here lifted his voice in stentorian tones), “Kerrow!” Again, as he passes, rises the soft “Kerree!”; again, as his form is lost in the distance, comes back the deep “Kerrow!” While Harte’s stories all have in them a certain element or background of humor, yet perhaps the majority of them are chiefly romantic or dramatic even more than they are humorous. Among the best of his short stories may be mentioned: The Luck of Roaring Camp (August, 1868, Overland), The Outcasts of Poker Flat (January, 1869, Overland), Tennessee’s Partner (October, 1869, Overland), Brown of Calaveras (March, 1870, Overland), Flip: a California Romance (in Flip, and Other Stories, 1882), Left Out on Lone Star Mountain (January, 1884, Longman’s), An Ingenue of the Sierras (July, 1894, McClure’s), The Bell-Ringer of Angel’s (in The Bell-Ringer of Angel’s, and Other Stories, 1894), Chu Chu (in The Bell-Ringer of Angel’s, and Other Stories, 1894), The Man and the Mountain (in The Ancestors of Peter Atherly, and Other Tales, 1897), Salomy Jane’s Kiss (in Stories in Light and Shadow, 1898), The Youngest Miss Piper (February, 1900, Leslie’s Monthly), Colonel Starbottle for the Plaintiff (March, 1901,

Harper's), A Mercury of the Foothills (July, 1901, *Cosmopolitan*), Lanty Foster's Mistake (December, 1901, *New England*), An Ali Baba of the Sierras (January 4, 1902, *Saturday Evening Post*), and Dick Boyle's Business Card (in *Trent's Trust, and Other Stories*, 1903). Among his notable collections of stories are: *The Luck of Roaring Camp, and Other Sketches* (1870), *Flip, and Other Stories* (1882), *On the Frontier* (1884), *Colonel Starbottle's Client, and Some Other People* (1892), *A Protégé of Jack Hamlin's, and Other Stories* (1894), *The Bell-Ringer of Angel's, and Other Stories* (1894), *The Ancestors of Peter Atherly, and Other Tales* (1897), *Openings in the Old Trail* (1902), and *Trent's Trust, and Other Stories* (1903). The titles and makeup of several of his collections were changed when they came to be arranged in the complete edition of his works.

Henry Cuyler Bunner (1855-1896) is one of the humorous geniuses of American literature. He is equally at home in clever verse or the brief short story. Prof. Fred Lewis Pattee has summed up his achievement as follows: "Another [than Stockton] who did much to advance the short story toward the mechanical perfection it had attained to at the close of the century was Henry Cuyler Bunner, editor of *Puck* and creator of some of the most exquisite *vers de société* of the period. The title of one of his collections, *Made in France: French Tales Retold with a U.S. Twist* (1893), forms an introduction to his fiction. Not that he was an imitator; few have been more original or have put more of their own personality into their work. His genius was Gallic. Like Aldrich, he approached the short story from the fastidious standpoint of the lyric poet. With him, as with Aldrich, art was a matter of exquisite touches, of infinite compression, of almost imperceptible shadings. The lurid splashes and the heavy emphasis of the local colorists offended his sensitive taste: he would work with

suggestion, with microscopic focussings, and always with dignity and elegance. He was more American than Henry James, more even than Aldrich. He chose always distinctively American subjects...FROM THE BOOKS.

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The Best American Humorous Short Stories H. C. Bunner, 2014-04-18 This volume

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The Best American Humorous Short Stories H. C. Bunner, 2018-06-20 In 1886, he

published a novel, *The Midge*, followed in 1887 by *The Story of a New York House*. But his best efforts in fiction were his short stories and sketches *Short Sixes* (1891), *More Short Sixes* (1894), *Made in France* (1893), *Zadoc Pine and Other Stories* (1891), *Love in Old Cloathes and Other Stories* (1896), and *Jersey Street and Jersey Lane* (1896). His verses *Airs from Arcady and Elsewhere* (1884), containing the well-known poem, *The Way to A ready; Rowen* (1892); and *Poems* (1896), edited by his friend Brander Matthews, displaying a light play of imagination and a delicate workmanship. He also wrote clever *vers de société* and parodies. One of his several plays (usually written in collaboration), was *The Tower of Babel* (1883).

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BEST AMERICAN HUMOROUS SHORT STORIES ALEXANDER. JESSUP, 2018

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