

# A Good Humour

From my father I have got the lion's share of an inheritance, I have got a good humour. And who was my father? Well, that's got nothing to do with humour! he was sprightly and portly, tubby and chubby, from the outside and the inside quite at variance with his office. And what was his office, his position in society? Well, were it to be written down and printed right at the beginning of a book, it would be reasonable if many people, having read it, laid the book aside and said that looks pretty ominous to me, I don't want anything of that sort. Despite this, my father was neither an executioner nor his assistant, on the contrary, his office often brought him in front of the most honourable men of the town, and there he was entitled to be, was completely in his right place; he had to be at the front, in front of the bishop, in front of princes of the blood – and indeed he was at the front – he was a hearse coachman!

There, now it's out! And I can add that when one saw my father sitting up there, at the front of death's omnibus, clad in his long, loose, black cloak, and with the black-fringed, three-pointed hat on his head, and in addition saw his face, which was precisely as one would draw the sun, round and smiling, one was unable to think of grief and grave; that face said: 'it doesn't matter, things will turn out much better than you think!'

Well now, from *him* I have my good humour as well as the habit of regularly visiting the cemetery; and it is most pleasurable when one can visit it when in a good humour, – and I also take the Advertiser, just as he did.

I am not all that young, – I have neither wife, children or library, but, as mentioned, I take the Advertiser, that is enough for me, it is the best newspaper for me, and it was that too for my father; it is useful and has everything a person needs to know: who is preaching in the churches and who is preaching in the new books! where one can acquire house, servants, clothing and food, who is 'selling out' and who is actually on the way out, and then one sees so much charity and so many innocent verses that are quite innocuous. Matrimony being sought and rendezvous that are embarked on or not embarked on! all of it simple and natural! It is absolutely possible to live happily and have oneself buried, just by taking the Advertiser – and then at the end of one's life one has such a lovely lot of paper that one can lie softly on it, should one not like lying on wood shavings.

The Advertiser and the cemetery, they are and have always been my two most intellectually stimulating forms of exercise, my two most wonderful spa baths for my good humour.

Anyone can delve into the Advertiser, but come with me into the cemetery, let us go there when the sun shines and the trees are green; let us walk among the graves! each of these is like a closed book with its back upwards, one can read the title, which says what the book contains and yet says nothing; but I know better, know it from my father and from myself. I have it in my *Grave Book*, and that is a book I have made myself, for usefulness and pleasure; there they all lie, and more besides!

We are now at the cemetery.

Here, behind the white-painted slatted fence, on the inside of which a rosebush once stood, – it is no longer there, but a little evergreen from the neighbouring grave stretches its fingers there, though only to brighten things up – there lies a very unhappy man, although when alive he got on well, as one says, had a good livelihood, and a little more besides, but he

took the world too much to heart, especially the world of art. If he was sitting one evening in the theatre to enjoy himself thoroughly, he could be completely put out if the stage mechanic had placed too much light inside both cheeks of the moon, or if the sky-borders hung in front of the scenery when they should be hanging behind it, or if there was a palm tree in Amager, a cactus in Tyrol, or beech trees far north in Norway! Isn't it a matter of complete indifference, who cares about such thing! it's a play after all, and you are there to enjoy it. – And then the audience clapped too much, or clapped too little. 'The firewood's wet,' he would say, 'it won't catch light this evening!' and then he would turn round to see what sort of people were there, and then he saw they laughed in all the wrong places, and that annoyed him and made him suffer and he was an unhappy individual, and now he is in the grave.

Here lies a very fortunate man, in other words a very fine man of noble birth, and that was his good fortune, for otherwise nothing would have become of him, but everything in nature is so wisely ordered that it is a pleasure to think of it. He was embroidered both front and back and was placed in the parlour, where one places the valuable, bead-embroidered bell pull behind which there is always a good, thick cord that actually does the work; he also had a good cord behind him, a substitute, which did the work and still does behind yet another new, embroidered bell pull. Everything is so wisely ordered that one is perfectly able to have a good humour.

Here, well, this is in fact extremely sad – ! here lies a man who for sixty-seven years had thought about producing some great witticism; he only lived for this witticism, and then he really did produce it, according to his own conviction, and he became so happy that he died of it, died of happiness at having produced this great witticism, and no one benefited from it, no one ever heard it. I can well imagine that he does not even rest at peace in his grave because of this great witticism, for suppose it was one that had to be said at lunchtime to make its effect, and that he – as people commonly believe of a dead man – can only come forth at midnight, then the witticism and the time do not correspond, no one laughs and he can return to his grave with it. It is a sad grave.

Here lies a very miserly lady; when alive, she would get up at night and miauw, so that the neighbours might think she had a cat; she was that miserly!

Here lies a young lady of good family; when in company she always let her singing voice be heard, and then she joined in singing '*mi manca la voce!*' that was the only truth of her life!

Here lies a different type of young lady! When the heart's canary starts to sing, reason stops its fingers in its ears. The lovely young maiden stood in a halo of matrimony – ! this is an everyday story – but that is putting it nicely. Let the dead rest in peace!

Here lies a widow that had a swan song in her mouth, and owl's gall in her heart. She prowled around families in search of her neighbour's shortcomings, just as in former times '*The Policeman's friend*' went around to find a gutter plank that wasn't there.

Here is a family burial-place; each link of the family line were so strong in the faith that if the whole world and the newspaper said something is such and such, and then the young son came home from school and said 'I heard it differently!' then his way was the only right one, for he was one of the family. And certainly it's true that should the family's rooster crow at midnight, it would still be morning to them, even though the night-watchmen and all the town clocks said it was midnight.

The great *Goethe* concludes his 'Faust' by stating that it 'can be continued', as can also our walk out here through the cemetery; I often come here! if one or other of my friends or non-friends make life too difficult for me, I come out here, find a patch of greensward and dedicate it to him or her – the one I would like to see buried, and then I immediately bury them, so that they lie there lifeless and powerless until they return as new and better human beings. Their lives and histories, seen from my point of view, I write down in my Grave Book, and that is what everyone ought to do, not get vexed when someone does something too annoying, but immediately bury them, keep one's good humour and take the Advertiser, that newspaper written by the people themselves, often with a held pen.

When the time comes that I, with the story of my life, am to be bound in the grave, then place as an inscription:

*'A good humour!'*

That is my story.