

## "The History of 'Punch'"

By M. H. Spielmann. With Numerous Illustrations. Cassell Pub. Co.

THE QUESTION, "Who invented Punch?"—not the liquid refreshment so called, nor the immortal though immoral puppet of the name, but the more or less comic weekly that has been for so long the chief repository of John Bull's wit and humor,—that question, at one time, seemed as insoluble as that other about the authorship of the Letters called of Junius. But now comes Mr. Spielmann, who in his very first chapter clears away forever the mystery that has enveloped the paper's birth. After four years of investigation, during which his correspondents, he says, have been numbered by hundreds, it turned out that *Punch's* pater was neither Mark Lemon nor Henry Mayhew, nor—last and least—Mr. Printer Last, but one Ebenezer Landells of Red Lion Court. Mr. Landells was a wood-engraver, draughtsman and newspaper projector, with, judging from the portrait printed by Mr. Spielmann, a good deal of the comic actor in his mobile mouth and twinkling eye. The success of the Paris *Charivari* had set an idea buzzing in his brain, that a similar venture might succeed in London. It is true that much the same idea had already occurred to Thackeray, Douglas Jerrold, Laman Blanchard, Percival Leigh, Kenny Meadows, John Leech and others, simultaneously or not, and had been so far carried towards realization that whole pages of text had been set up. But this, as Mr. Spielmann suggests, has nothing to do with the case. The scheme of this London *Charivari* fell through when Thackeray mistakenly suggested that each of the projectors might be held responsible for the debts incurred by the others.

But "Daddy Landells," otherwise known as "Old Tooche-it-Oop," mentioned his scheme to Last, the printer, who introduced him and his project to Henry Mayhew, solicitor. Mr. Mayhew communicated it to his room-fellow, Postans, and Postans posted off to Mark Lemon's "rooms" in Newcastle Street, Mark being then a "not half bad" dabbler in verse and the lighter drama, and a not very successful keeper of a small tavern. Here and at similar places the meetings were held which determined the birth, form and composition of *Punch*. Mr. Spielmann gives in facsimile the first draft of the prospectus in Lemon's hand, intimating that "this gulfawgraph is intended to form a refuge for destitute wit, an asylum for the thousands of orphan jokes, the superannuated Joe Millers, the millions of perishing puns," which, it is customary to say, have since profited by the hospitality of its pages. Having set *Punch* up again, and given credit where credit is due, Mr. Spielmann goes on in the same painstaking way to set before us previously undiscovered facts concerning the comic youngster's early progress and vicissitudes. *Punch* was, it appears, at first as impecunious and nearly as vulgar as Mr. Pennell's protégée, *Ally Sloper*. But he soon found financial aid, made an enormous success of his first almanac, and dined his contributors on "whistling oysters" and "high spirits." *Punch*, as a politician, has always been aggressive; his influence on dress and fashion has been, we are told, for the best, though it is possible that Mrs. *Punch*, who at first openly superintended the fashion department, ought to be credited with these triumphs.

The chapter on *Punch's* jokes is rather dismal reading, leading us to imagine that no such thing as an original joke is to be had for love or money; that, in fact, humanity has long since passed through its jocular period. But the chapters on "Cartoons and Cartoonists" reassure us a little, and

the further chapters on *Punch's* "wars." We return to sad and solemn facts in the accounts of *Punch's* engraving and printing department, his bills and receipts. The illustrations are mostly portraits of the writers, artists, business-managers, engravers and printers of *Punch*, with only such reproductions of his comic cuts as may serve a serious purpose. In short, the book is a serious one all through, matter for the future historian of Victorian society rather than for the living reader to laugh over. But the latter may expect to find, here and there, something to make the corners of his mouth curl upwards.

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