

PHILIP H. WELCH, THE HUMORIST.

[From the New York Sun of February 25.]

Philip H. Welch, the man who made the English-speaking world laugh for years, is dead. Happily for the memory he would have wished to leave, the tears that have been shed have been only those of a few intimate friends, and will not mar the record of his joyous influence while on earth.

But the wonders about Welch are yet to be told. When he was at his best—when he had a corner in humor and was making half the continent laugh, a sore broke out on the back of his tongue, and for weeks it nagged and worried him night and day, waking and sleeping and joking—for it never stopped his flow of fun. The doctors declared the sore a cancer, so he announced between jokes at the office, and the next thing his friends knew he had gone to the hospital to have an operation performed. The doctors cut a large part of his tongue out. Incredible as it must appear, it is still the fact that beyond a shadow of pain in his face and a hint of sadness in his voice he was back again in a few days the same Phil Welch; no, not the same, but a lighter-spirited Welch than he had been before. He believed the cancerous element in his system had been eradicated. It was like sudden liberty to a man confined under sentence of death. He reappeared at his desk with his sober face and business-like air writing his jokes as a canary sings—each one taking up the middle of half a sheet of note paper.

The operation by which he lost his tongue was performed nearly three years ago. It left him able to talk, but, of course, very imperfectly—like a tongue-tied person. Two years passed, and last summer another cancer formed, this time on his chest. Again the surgeons went at him, knife in hand, and again Welch appeared at the *Sun* office after a fortnight's illness.

"Old fellow," said a friend, "how are the jokes coming now? Are you not depressed to find that you were not cured, after all, by the first operation, and that cancer is still in your system?"

"Depressed?" said the humorist. "I was horribly depressed, so horribly that I had to turn my whole attention to writing jokes. I wrote more jokes and made more money while I was lying abed recovering from this last operation than I ever wrote in the same length of time before. I had to do it. I did not dare to think of myself."

Fancy jokes coming from under a surgeon's knife, written by a man in the very bloom of life lying in a hospital, knowing he must soon die, thinking of the world he loved and yet must soon leave, of his wife and the two charming little girls* that on sunny mornings always took a hand of his, one on either side, for a walk out of doors. What becomes of the pictures Dickens drew of the clowns who bounded on the stage or in the ring to hide their grief over some one's sickness or death? A score of great writers have dwelt on such phases in the lives of public performers, but what are all their stories compared with the facts about Phil Welch?

The second operation to which Mr. Welch was subjected was experimental. It convinced the surgeons that to remove the cancer they would have to make too deep incisions near vital parts. A Boston physician attempted to eradicate the disease by applying plasters. He treated the patient for six months, and then gave up the case as hopeless. During this

* There are also two little boys—the oldest not yet nine years of age, the youngest but little more than a year old.

treatment Mr. Welch spent part of his time in Boston. Up to within three days of his death he worked with the greatest fortitude for *Harper's*, the *Sun*, *Life*, and the *Epoch*. Up to this time he was able to sit up and dictate to his wife. Then he had to take to his bed.

[From The Evening Post of February 25.]

The death of Mr. Philip H. Welch removes one of the brightest and most promising humorists ever developed in the school of American journalism. His reputation has always been far below his deserts, because—unlike "Artemus Ward," "Miles O'Reilly," and "Burdette"—the greater part of his work was published without either his own name or a *nom de guerre* which gained a distinctive personality. Of late he has made more use of his name in some publications, notably *Puck* and the *Epoch*, and was thus becoming known as an individuality to a public which never learned who was the author of the bits of humor that constantly appeared in the *Sun*. So well deserved was the reputation which Mr. Welch was thus winning that THE EVENING POST has taken great pleasure in always attaching his name to such of his writings as were copied among our "Waifs" when it accompanied those writings in the journal where they were originally published. None of our humorists has more clearly understood the fundamental principle that "brevity is the soul of wit." His jokes usually took the form of a short conversation—often were nothing more than question and answer—the point, which was apt to hit some folly of the day, appearing in the closing words. Avoiding the vulgarity which so often disfigures newspaper humor, he frequently showed a wonderful cleverness of thought and happiness of expression. Practice was steadily developing his powers, and brightening the outlook for his future, when about three years ago he was attacked by cancer. A surgical operation appeared, but only appeared, to arrest the disease, and with its recurrence a year ago his early death was seen to be inevitable. During this year that he has been wasting away he kept up his work almost to the very last; and, most remarkable of all, in quality as well as in quantity. Within a week of his death from a most terrible disease, he was dictating jokes which showed no diminution of his mental powers. He had the great satisfaction of realizing that he had contributed largely to the innocent amusement of the public, and of finding the demands from publishers for his work increasing as the end approached. Like so many newspaper humorists, Mr. Welch drifted into his occupation from a business career, having entered it only a little more than six years ago. His work lies for the most part scattered through the files of many journals with no mark to identify it, but some of his *Puck* sketches which showed more sustained power were published in book form under the title of 'The Tailor-Made Girl,' and will hold their place in the small library of American humor. Mr. Welch was but forty years of age, and leaves a wife and four young children.

[From Puck of March 13.]

The death of Mr. Philip H. Welch is a matter of concern to all readers of this paper. It was in these columns that his name first became known to the public, and much of his best and most characteristic work went to

form the volume reprinted from *Puck* a year ago.

Mr. Welch's keen and subtle wit—a wit founded on a quick and sensitive knowledge of human nature—found free expression only in the later years of his life. It may be that we judge with partiality, but to us it seems a wit so rare, so true, and so delicately perceptive, that we are at a loss to find his equal among men of far greater literary fame.

The story of Mr. Welch's final sufferings has been told by so many journals that it only remains for us to bear our testimony to the marvellous heroism with which he faced and met a cruel and lingering death; fearing nothing for himself, working in pain and weakness to leave his family beyond the reach of need.

It seems hardly possible to end these few words without speaking of Mr. Welch's wife—his partner in the writing of the well-known "Dialogues." It was for her that he lived and toiled during three years of suffering, and she inspired him and cared for him to the end, in sickness and in health, until death parted them.

[From Life of March 7.]

Mr. Welch's heroism and fortitude were unbounded. From the different hospitals where he vainly searched for relief, from his sick-bed at home, from other cities, whither he journeyed to obtain the aid of eminent physicians in his hopeless struggle for life, he turned out his quota of work as regularly as when he sat at his desk in the office of the *Sun*. More than once, indeed, the faint odor of an anæsthetic upon his manuscript, reaching this desk from a hospital the day after an operation, was pitiful evidence of the desperate conditions under which he labored, yet never did he write or utter one word of complaint.

It was in Mr. Welch's last days, however, that his heroism was best manifested. Until within a few months, he had ventured to hope against hope that medical science might prove equal to the desperate emergency his condition presented; but early last summer he began to realize fully that he was past human aid. And now ensued a new and more piteous phase of the struggle with death. The encroachments of his disease were daily more agonizing, and but for the exertion of an extraordinary power of will, he could not have endured the awful ordeal.

And gladly would he have laid down the burden of life were it not for one reason: Mr. Welch was not a rich man; he depended upon his labor for his own and his family's daily bread. At his death his loved ones might be left in comparative poverty save for what he would be able to put by for them before he succumbed. And this young hero suffered daily a thousand deaths that he might leave them in better circumstances. Actually holding the grim monster at arm's length, he labored on day after day. Capt. Shannon, writing the prospectus of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, a "journal written by gentlemen for gentlemen," in the squalor of Fleet Prison, does not constitute an incongruity in any degree so tragic as this picture of Mr. Welch, with the actual clutch of death at his throat, penning, with hourly failing strength, the witticisms that should make happier people laugh.

Many a hero of the battlefield, whose name is written indelibly upon the scroll of fame, would have proved unequal to the test that Philip H. Welch passed with such splendid courage and fortitude.