

*The*  
DEVELOPMENT  
*of*  
ENGLISH HUMOUR.  
Louis Cazamian

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# THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH HUMOUR

*by*

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PART I

*From the Early Times to the Renaissance*

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## FOREWORD

This volume incorporates the substance of lectures delivered at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, on the Aberystwyth Lectures Foundation, during the Session 1929-1930.

Humour is not the privilege of any country or any time. In its broadest connotation, it is an aspect of thought, or an aesthetic category. The present inquiry is not concerned with that general object. Humour is essentially concrete; it has its roots no less, and more, in the originality of national groups, than in the faculties of the abstract human being. Its growth may thus be regarded as part and parcel of the moral life and mental progress of a people; and it is studied here as such. Even so, however, the question arises of the influences which that development may have felt from abroad; and the problem of the connection between Mediaeval French and Middle English humour has had to be recognized.

The history of English humour is followed, in this first part, only as far as the end of the Middle Ages. The survey will be carried to the twentieth century in at least two more parts, with a fuller

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treatment, answering to a relatively much more abundant matter. The significance of the process, however, is partly exhausted with the emergence of completely developed humour, from the age of Addison to that of Lamb. The notion of humour explained in the first chapter, and upon which the whole argument is based, made it inevitable that the investigation should be practically restricted to literary texts. It is only in words that the duality of intent which we regard as characteristic of humour in the precise sense, can be aptly expressed. The diffused humour which reveals itself through art and life is commonly merged in the indiscriminate field of the comic—fun, amusement, drollery pure and simple, from which it is not easily distinguishable.

Modern renderings have been given of the Old English or Old French texts quoted, and those from Middle English authors, with the exception of Chaucer, have been modernized.

Very few studies bearing at all on the initial and early stages of our subject are in existence. On the contrary, the investigation of its further periods, and that of its general elements, receive much help from a number of books. It seems more proper to reserve a list of authorities, however tentative and limited, for the end of our task.

Our thanks are due to Professor Emile Legouis, of the Sorbonne, who has looked over our manu-

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*February, 1930.*



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