

Charles Robert Anon

[Carta ao Natal Mercury — 7 Jul. 1905]

Durban, 7th. July, 1905

«The Man in the Moon»,
«Natal Mercury» Office,
Durban.

Sir,

I have been somewhat astonished, in the perusal of the «Natal Mercury», and especially of your column, to perceive how meanly, and in what slavish way, sarcasm and irony are heaped on the Russians, on their army, and on their Emperor. I know too well that it is the nature of men; where are not culture and dignity, to laugh at misery and at disaster, so that these be to the harm of others, and implicate themselves in no way. Even where some consideration exists for the soul-clear bounds of tragedy and of comedy, and nothing but that consideration — no feeling and no thought besides — laughter is repressed at those things which outlie the bounds of the ridiculous.

Every reverse and disaster of the Russian army or navy is in such a way made the subject of a jest among us, that we seem to have nothing more amusing. Some of the Russian admirals, even after their death or their capture, have caused us outbursts of sniggering. The Czar himself, when dismayed by revolution and by war, and when in distress and in grief over his armies, appears to be taken by the British people as an animate joke of great value.

To us, Englishmen, of all men the most egotistic, the thought has never occurred that misery and grief ennobles, despicable and self-caused though they be. A drunken woman reeling through the streets is a pitiable sight. The same woman falling awkwardly in her drunkenness is, mayhap, an amusing spectacle. But this very same woman, drunken and awkward though she be, when weeping the death of her child is no contemptible nor ridiculous creature, but a tragic figure as great as your Hamlets and your King Lear.

If I may be permitted to make one more consideration, I should like to point out that pure shame should restrain us from laughter at the Russian woes, and

from the making of jokes upon them. It is quite clear, I believe, that our hearty amusement may be constructed, not even by one malicious, into a joy from the relief we now have from fears of an Indian disturbance. Russia does not now threaten our Eastern possession; and is it therefore that we laugh? Surely this thought is too obvious; it must have occurred to us ere we laughed — the greater shame that we laugh notwithstanding.

As an answer, however meagre, to these ridiculings, I send you three sonnets, for which I ask such pulchricity as has been extended to writers on the other side.

On the whole, I am extremely sorry to have such proofs of human ignobleness and unfeeling. We should not, were we in truth manly, laugh at the woes of others; but we cannot, as it seems, force manliness on ourselves. Yet if misery and grief delight us, and the woes of our enemies amuse, let us be so far noble as to say no thing, and look within us our joy — let us not, however it may be, burst into laughter, least of all into the unsteady sniggering of those whose fears are dispelled, than which there is nothing more base.

Yours faithfully,
Charles Robert Anon.

7-7-1905

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