

Karol Mullaney-Dignam "Larkin' about"

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One hundred years ago, the Weekly Irish Times featured a regular column entitled 'The Jokers Corner' comprising prizewinning jokes by readers from around the country. Jokes were submitted on postcards addressed to 'Joke', Weekly Irish Times, 31 Westmoreland Street, Dublin, and the best jokes received each week were published. Half-crowns were awarded to the two that the Editor considered the best while 'standard books' were given as consolation prizes to the others. The jokes generally took the form of questions-and-answers or a short story and typically employed sarcasm or wordplay to realise their humorous intent.

Certain categories of jokes prevailed: the Irishman, the Englishman and the Scotsman; the Irishman abroad; education; economy; animals; illness; the military and constabulary; food and alcohol; courtship and marriage; gender and class. By 1913, quips referencing the Suffragette movement were occasionally featuring. Examples included:

#### A NEW LINE OF DEFENCE

The German Chief of Staff shook his head. "No", he replied to the brilliant assemblage about the council table, "we are not prepared to invade Britain."

The veteran Nicolshnapps looked amazed. "But we have the fleet," he cried, "yes, and the grand army, yes, and the submarines, and the airship, true. We know that the British Fleet is scattered, and the army unprepared, why should we hesitate?"

"Yes, but you forgot the Suffragettes," said the Chief of Staff, coolly.

(M. Foley, Ballydoole, Roscommon. 3 May 1913)

#### HARD ON THE FIREMEN

Mr Jones: "Another lordly mansion destroyed by 'suffragette' incendiaries; only a mass of smouldering wreckage left. I left the firemen playing on the ruins."

Mrs Jones: "Shocking! Cards, no doubt. Positively indecent I call it. The fellows ought to be reported."

(May McGing, Tourbeck House, Ayle, Westport, Co. Mayo. 23 August 1913)

#### HER CHOICE

Magistrate to suffragette (who has set fire to two public buildings): "As you did this damage wilfully, I must give you seven days' imprisonment or forty shillings."

Suffragette: "Thank you, I will accept the money."

(Nannie Daly, Milford House, Mary Road, Carlingford, Newry. 23 August 1913)

#### BRIDGET KNEW THEM

Mrs 'Suffragette': "Now, I have engaged you, Bridget, I am to begin at once to give you a little training in the art of waiting on guests. You see my daughter is coming out next month."

Bridget: "Indade, mum, an' how long was she sint to prisin for?"

(Mrs MacSweeney, 2 Portland Place, Cork. 8 August 1914)

Characters and events of the Dublin Lockout of 1913-14 also made it into 'The Jokers Corner' as the following selection reveals:

#### THE 'STRIKE' JOKE

Brown: "I say, Jones, what do you think of the recent Castle discussion between Messrs Healy and Larkin?"

Jones: "All a huge joke."

Brown: "How's that?"

Jones: "Why it is only a case of 'Tim and Jim Larkin'" (Larking)

(Miss M. English, C.G. Station, Clontarf, Dublin. 25 October 1913)

#### NO MATCHES

Jones: "Did you hear the latest?"

Brown: "No. What is it?"

Jones: "Terrible. There are to be no marriages in Dublin until after Christmas."

Brown: "Why?"

Jones: "Because the match-makers are all out on strike!"

(B. McDonagh, Main St., Boyle, Co. Roscommon. 25 October 1913)

#### BEHIND TIME

First Boy: "Why did Larkin throw the clock out of the window at Liberty Hall the other night?"

Second Boy: "I give it up."

First Boy: "Because it would not strike."

(Anthony Cuddy, Glen Herbert, Bray. 27 December 1913)

#### WHAT TOM LEARNED

Friend: "Well, Tom, what do you learn at school?"

Tom: "All sorts of things."

Friend: "Well now. Tell me where matches are made."

Tom: "Eaven and Sweden, sir."

(Edward Byron de Lacy, 68 Marlborough Road, Donnybrook, Co. Dublin. 3 January 1914)

#### A PRECARIOUS SITUATION

"Was your husband much frightened when he saw the police making a charge, and using their batons on the rioters?"

"Indeed, and he was. He shook like an ass upon a leaf."

(Miss Bull, 1 Synnott Place, Dublin. 14 February 1914)

Ostensibly written and published for amusement, these jokes can be viewed today as historically specific cultural formations with topical witticisms providing contemporary voices and insights.