

# The Fool-Killer

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## TUNE IN! LISTEN!

Hello, folks! Howdy - do! How is everybody and all of his kinfolks? This is station FK, Wilkesboro, N. C., on the air—your Uncle Pearson broadcasting. Everybody come up close so you can hear good, because I want to pour some choice and well-selected language into your think-boxes, and I want you to get every word of it.

Now, honey-bunches, if you are all ready and waiting, I will turn on the chin-music. I'm not quite in the mood for writing today, and so I'll just talk. I can usually write better than I can talk, but it seems to be just the other way this time, and so you'll just have to let me rattle on till I run dry, and I don't know how long that will be. Just at this minute I seem to be pretty well loaded with things I would like to say, and if I don't get stage fright or some other fatal disease I may just rattle on all day.

I've got a sort of confession to make. For the last few months I have been sorter betwixt and between, as Shakespeare says, not knowing exactly what sort of heads needed cracking the worst, nor what sort of a club I had better use to do the cracking. And it ain't quite clear to me yet, so I am calling on you folks to help me decide.

I reckon that you have noticed that I am a sort of two-sided feller in some respects. Not two-faced, mind you. I don't mean that. But two-sided, which is a different matter entirely. I don't want to be like Mr. Facing-Both-Ways in Pilgrim's Progress, and I don't want to be a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Hope nobody thinks I am akin to them fellers. But I reckon it is a fact that I've got a serious streak and a funny streak sorter mixed and blended into me till you can't hardly tell tuther from which. I always knew I had the serious and studious element in me, but I never even suspected the funny streak until about the time I started The Fool-Killer. I can't remember the time when I didn't want to be a writer, but I never had any notion of trying to become known as a "funny writer." That was the last thing I would have thought about. But when I started The Fool-Killer I gradually dropped into droll mannerisms and used a few home-made expressions that seemed to tickle the folks, and the next thing I knew I was a famous "funny man" like Bill Nye and Mark Twain. Even some of the big magazines in New York and else-

where have referred to me as a well-known humorous writer, and it turns out that I have got more fame in that direction than I ever expected. And all because I used a little drollery to penetrate the thick skulls of the people and teach them some common sense. And now, having got the reputation of being funny, it is the hardest thing in the world to live it down or to get away from it when I want to be serious about something. But there are times when I want to get entirely away from the "funny" side of things and just hammer the cold hard facts into the half-witted world with a two-handed club with spikes in it.

But still some folks insist that I am a "funny" writer, and they demand that I live up to my reputation. Which is a big order, if you want my opinion. But I have been trying my doggondest to do it, and the result hasn't been quite satisfactory. You see, it has caused me to get a mixed following—one crowd that don't care for anything but fun and foolishness, and another crowd that wants me to dive into the deep and serious problems of life and give them some straight common sense without any bibs and tuckers on it.

In other words, there is a shallow crowd that wants shallow thinking, and there is a deep crowd that wants deep thinking. And to please both of these crowds is the problem.

Now, folks, the question is this: What sort of a Fool-Killer do you want? Do you want a regular monkey-shine funny paper with nothing else to it? Or do you prefer some good serious common sense with just enough fun to flavor it? My notion is that you prefer the serious common sense, (flavored to taste, as the cook-book says), and that's what I had much rather give you. Oh, I'll put in plenty of the flavoring, don't you fret, but what I mean is that I want to handle real serious subjects—things that are living and vital issues in the lives of the people—and I want to feel free to do that without stopping every minute to think of some cross-legged fool expression to drag in. Let the laughs come when they come naturally and fit in all right, but let's not break our fool necks trying to strain after them. That's my notion. Do you indorse it? And will you stand up to the rack and help me fight it out on that line till victory comes? Everybody who is willing to do that, say I. The I's have it, and it is so ordered.

And now the next question is this: Among the many real and

vital issues now before the people, which one do you think is of the most general interest and importance? I have come to believe that some phase of the RELIGIOUS issue touches more people in a tender spot than anything else. I used to devote most of The Fool-Killer's space to questions of religion and theology, presenting the arguments from my unorthodox standpoint. In those days I got up a great interest and a big hooraw among the folks. Some were for me and some against me, and everybody on both sides was ready to fight at the drop of a hat, and we were having just the nicest sort of a little fuss all the time.

But it came to pass later that other people got an interest in the paper, and then I was no longer free to express myself in the free and flat-footed way I had been doing. I had to sorter ease up, you see, in order to not offend those who were financially connected with the paper. It was an awkward position to be in, and left me just "dancing on the air," as I once expressed it, and not able to take a firm and fearless stand on anything. The idea in the minds of the others was to make a "funny paper" and not take any stand on disputed questions. But I never did believe it would work. I could always get better results by having opinions about things and saying just what I thought in plain language. I never did entirely give up the right to express myself, but I surrendered more than I wanted to and more than was good for the paper.

And all the time I have been seeing that many of my best friends and club-getters were disappointed, and that they wanted more of my "theological stuff" like I used to give them. They have made this very plain in their letters, and some of them entirely lost interest because I got away from the thing that kept their interest alive.

I see the point, and I hope you folks see it, too. The point is that just now men and women are more interested in religious and theological questions than in anything else. This may not seem to be true at first glance, but it is. Approach a man that you might think is not interested in anything at all, and begin to pump him on religion or theology, and you will soon start something. Whether he agrees or disagrees with you he will show interest, and in either case he is good material to work on.

Even the agnostics and infidels are terribly interested in religious questions. Their interest consists in wanting to discredit religion, deny the existence of

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God, and heap reproach upon the Bible. But the curious fact is that they are all the time talking about the thing that they say isn't worth talking about. For instance, there is E. Haldeman-Julius, of Girard, Kansas. He is a very brilliant man and a greatly gifted writer and editor. He seems to have dedicated his life to the task of destroying God and all belief in anything that is called religion. Every week he tries to prove in his able way that God never did exist, and yet he goes right on trying to destroy something that never existed. The point is that the infidels are talking religion from their standpoint. They are helping to advertise it. And they are living witnesses to the fact that religion, in its various phases, is the liveliest question of the day.

The infidels are a small minority. Nearly all people believe in the existence of a God and have some sort of belief in the Bible. But generally they are all befuddled about it and can't give any intelligent reason for the faith that is in them. That's what gives the infidel his chance. He sees that the priesthood and the clergy have wilfully misled the people and fattened on their ignorance and superstition, and he says so. Of course that is true, and right there is the most prolific source of doubt and infidelity among the people. What we need is some sort of leadership and teaching that will expose and condemn the false teachers of theology and at the same time point out the true and reasonable path for the people to follow.

I am in rather close touch with a good many of the leading writers and thinkers of the country, and almost without exception they are agnostics or infidels. What made them so? Nothing in the world but the false and blasphemous theology which was crammed down their throats in childhood, and which they had sense enough to spew out when they got older. They believed that stuff to be all there was of religion, because that was all they were taught. Having learned in later life how they were swindled and imposed upon in the name of religion, it is quite natural that they would reject everything that called itself religion. I don't wonder at it at all. And I don't condemn them

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