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Leacock: Economist/Satirist in *Arcadian Adventures and Sunshine Sketches*

In 1899 Stephen Leacock discovered Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, gave up his occupation as a teacher at Upper Canada College and enrolled at the University of Chicago to study Economics in Veblen's department.¹ Like his mentor, Leacock became a sharp-eyed critic of the laissez-faire economics of Adam Smith — in short, the belief that under free competition, the "visible hand" of supply and demand brings about a just price for everything and consequently an equitable distribution of income and wealth. Both Veblen and Leacock insisted that the pecuniary preoccupation of a capitalistic society leads not to the maximization of production but to the maximization of profits, which in turn leads to an extreme disparity of income and wealth. Veblen accounts for his disparity through what he calls "capitalistic sabotage", a phrase suggesting that free competition would work if it were not for industrialists restricting output in order to increase prices and profits. Leacock not only agrees but explains the necessary conditions for "capitalistic sabotage". Leacock's equivalent phrase, "economic strength", is dependent upon a "give-and-take resting on relative bargaining strengths" which may be attributed to varying degrees of native ability, acquired skills, accumulation of non-human resources, and collective organization: "Every man gets what he can and gives what he has to."²

To Leacock the problem is basically an inequitable distribution of income giving rise to the misallocation of human labour to non-necessities, a problem in the direction and distribution of human efforts. It would seem then that Leacock depends upon Veblen's earlier contention that man has ceased to be concerned with production for the sake of satisfying his basic needs and instead has become preoccupied primarily with profit and with the various symbols expressing pecuniary power.

In Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), leisure is one of the standard signs of pecuniary success. Hence Veblen's satirical explanation of the "conspicuous consumption" of goods, money and time: such consumption demonstrates the power of the consumer to pay. Hence the "utility" of idle servants and wives, hand-crafted and fragile utensils, sports and war and the arts and religion — all these "leisure" activities proving either the wealth of the "doer" or the one who owns or patronizes the "doer". Veblen's critique works from the paradox that the most able become the least productive — Leacock's "idle rich".

Where Veblen and Leacock differ is in their solutions to the problem. Veblen would solve the riddle of social injustice by creating a technocratic utopia, taking the power of production out of the hands of the plutocratic businessman, and transferring it to the engineers whose interest is in production, not profit. Technocracy (the rule of experts) would replace plutocracy (the rule of the wealthy). It is obvious that Veblen believes that the engineer, the descendant of the earlier craftsman, would continue to take pride in his labour and produce goods without being diverted by the plutocrat's preoccupation with profit or pecuniary symbols.

The title of Leacock's book, *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* (1920), indicates immediately a scepticism greater than Veblen's and suggests perhaps the attitude of a conservative who does not trust easily in social progress brought about by utopian schemes. It is not surprising then that Leacock does not glorify the newly-arrived (e.g. Veblen's engineers) or the class they might arrive from. Leacock is all too aware that industrial workers become dehumanised, obsessed, not only with money but with materialistic concerns having no relation to higher or larger purpose. This sceptical view is sharply illustrated in *Arcadian Adventures* by Mr. Newberry who is forever blowing things up — including Italian labourers — on his extravagant country retreat. Says Leacock puckishly: ". . . it had not always been theirs to command dynamite and control the forces of nature".³ The problem then seems not one of production but of the foolish misallocation of human energy: "Even though each man accomplishes almost thirty or forty times what he did before, the world is not thirty or forty times better off, the working hours are not one-thirtieth of what they were before. The reason for the poverty is the misallocation of human labour to non-necessities."⁴ This statement is obviously not at odds with Veblen's satirical representation of the production of "goods", a production whose only purpose is the enabling of conspicuous consumption or the expression of pecuniary power.

Leacock's hope however, lies not in the establishment of a new clique of experts but in the more modest establishment of government legislation which might check the abuses of free competition — in Galbraithian terms, a countervailing legislative power which would act directly in the economy by gradually raising the minimum wage, reducing working hours, creating jobs for unemployed workers, and ensuring health and educational services for children and aid to the unemployed and disabled.⁵ This mixture of government control and business enterprise, this piecemeal and gradual approach to resolving social inequities, does not sound very dramatic. Perhaps what Leacock has done all too well is anticipate the evolution of a mixed socialist-capitalist economy like that of Canada today.

Leacock's *Arcadian Adventures Among the Idle Rich* then can be seen as a sceptical and humorous extension of Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*. The titles themselves indicate the common preoccupation. While the opening of *Arcadian Adventures* could be taken by the unwary reader as mere madcap whimsey, to the reader who is aware of Veblen's influence upon Leacock, the passage is satirically directed against the pecuniary obsessions of the plutocratic class in a capitalistic society. The excessive and impossible superlatives of the first sentence finally turn back upon themselves and suggest a satiric intent, for the Mausoleum Club rests not only upon "the *quietest* corner of the *best* residential street in the City" surrounded by "*great* elm trees" but possesses as well the "*most* expensive kind of birds — singing in the branches." The somnambulant atmosphere appropriate to the idle rich is accentuated by "solitary chauffeurs returning at 10:30 after conveying the *earlier* of the millionaires to their downtown offices." The sound of their automobiles reminding one of the sound of bees in silence — "great motors mov[ing] drowsily" — accentuates the peaceful quiet of this synthetic Arcadia and draws attention to the expensiveness of that quiet. Certainly as one moves from the "*most expensive* birds" to "expensive nursemaids wheeling *valuable* children" the application of pecuniary terms and values over all things becomes increasingly apparent. Moreover, Leacock is not content merely to declare that the children of Plutoria Avenue are "worth millions and millions" and are thereby far more impressive than any prince or princess of the old world. He makes the criterion of money alone become even more blatant as children are transformed swiftly from people into abstract corporate entities: from a "toddling princess in a rabbit suit who owns fifty distilleries in her own right", to a child who controls an entire New Jer-

sey corporation "from its cradle" and who is being sued "in a vain attempt to make her dissolve herself into constituent companies", from princes and princesses who are "more real" because by juxtaposed suggestion they are "incalculable" — i.e., immeasurably wealthy. From these suggestions that the children have worth and reality only because of their wealth or perhaps of the tax advantage they permit their fathers, Leacock takes these children to a climactic sentence which suggests an absolute transformation, abstraction or reduction of the children into sheer monetary power: "A million dollars of preferred stock laughs merrily in recognition of majority control going past in a go-cart drawn by an imported nurse."⁶

Would it be stretching a point too far to infer that the innocent children exemplify the basic irresponsibility of the capitalist system as they or their corporate holdings may be construed as legal entities having powers of holding property without having individual or personal responsibility to the law? Certainly the whole of *Arcadian Adventures* shows the Plutorians operating with impunity, busy gulling those less sharp than themselves, and never seeming to come up against any institutional check except perhaps the predatory con-artist more clever than themselves.

In "The Little Dinner", the first story of *Arcadian Adventures*, Boulder, who takes the Duke of Dulham to his Minnesota hunting camp, exemplifies the unchecked spirit of acquisitiveness which animates the Plutorians. As the newspaper reports: ". . . Mr. Boulder intends to show his guest, who is an ardent sportsman, something of the American wolf." As if the totem is not already explicit enough, Leacock's narrator sardonically observes: "Boulder looked at him with *fixed, silent*, eyes, and murmured from time to time some renewed information on the ferocity of the timber-wolf. But of wolves other than the timber-wolf, and fiercer still, into whose hands the Duke might fall in America, he spoke never a word."⁷ In fact the basic tension of this story depends upon the predatory attempt of each to gull the other. Will the Duke, the old-world, aristocratic predator, who "could have understood knocking a man over the head with a fire shovel and taking his money, but not borrowing it"⁸ succeed in overcoming his embarrassment about broaching the subject of money, succeed in obtaining the loan? Will Fyshe, the new-world, plutocratic predator, succeed in conning the Duke into investing his supposed capital in Fyshe's enterprise? After discovering the Duke's financial plight, will Fyshe, Boulder's supposed friend, succeed in duping Boulder into an entirely profitless hunting trip

with the Duke? It would seem at the end of the story that the Duke's visit to the Mausoleum Club has been transformed into "a passing and pleasant memory" because the club members have managed to avoid being seriously duped and *may* have duped another. In the first chapter then, Leacock's reduction of children into no more than money and his exposure of the predatory spirit impelling these people indicates a humour that is pointedly satirical.

The remainder of *Arcadian Adventures* anatomizes the homogenization of modern culture by the pecuniary impulse. Tomlinson who is the focus of the next two chapters, "The Wizard of Finance" and the "Arrested Philanthropy of Mr. Tomlinson", might appear to offer some hope of resistance against such homogenization of culture, but Tomlinson is no more than a satiric foil, an anachronistic or vestigial norm, pointing to the all-consuming power of money. In the eyes of the Plutorians, Tomlinson is not a farmer who has accidentally found his homestead to be situated over a goldmine, nor a man who is desperately trying to get rid of his money in the stockmarket, but the financial wizard whose rural reserve bespeaks hidden reserves of shrewdness. But to Leacock's narrator who insists that he sees behind the appearances, "there lies over the vision of this vanished farm an infinite regret". Living within the huge and synthetic "home" of the Palaver Hotel, a home having fifteen floors, three thousand windows and the capacity to house Washinton's army, Tomlinson like so many other Leacockean characters dreams of the small rural world of the past, "a wind-swept hillside farm beside Lake Erie, where Tomlinson's Creek runs down to the low edge of the lake, and where the off-shore wind ripples the rushes of the shallow water: that, and the vision of a frame house, and the snake fences of the fourth concession road where it falls to the lakeside."⁹ Leacock compounds the sorrow of this man dispossessed from what would seem a genuine Arcadia by lightly and ironically laying upon him the fate which any Plutorian would aspire to — the touch of Midas: "Like the touch of Midas, his hand turned everything to gold."¹⁰ While Leacock does not belabour the economics of Tomlinson's unintentional financial success, it is obvious that Tomlinson with his large capital becomes the classic Bear Buyer, the investor who gets into the market as it is going down, buying up bargains in anticipation of long-term gains. Thus while Tomlinson thinks he is ridding himself of money, sending poor money after worse, in fact he is engaged unconsciously in a sophisticated stock transaction which gains the ad-

miration of the Plutorians. Moreover, as Tomlinson's reputation of financial wizardry is inflated by the newspapers, his very act of buying any stock attracts other buyers who attempt to ride the bandwagon with him, thereby suddenly increasing demand and the price of the stock: "R.O.P. and T.R.R. would take as sudden a leap in the air as might a mule with a galvanic shock applied to its tail."¹¹ Perhaps what Leacock's fable really points to is that in the pecuniary or plutocratic society, especially as seen through market psychology, "value" has no relation to real worth.

After the financial collapse which permits Tomlinson to return to the sacred spot of his forefathers' farm and burial ground, it appears that nothing very real has happened in Plutoria. Despite the epic "inflation" of the market crash, little is changed: the astute attempt still to gull their more naive brothers. Tomlinson, however, stands unconsciously in his simple, unaffected and stodgy integrity as an unexpected, almost unperceived vestige of the past, an ironic norm which exposes pecuniary values having no relation to real worth. Leacock's meaning is all too apparent when Tomlinson's son Fred suddenly reverts to his rough tweed country suit and declares in his anger and pride (while the doorman, obviously a lavishly costumed Veblenesque lackey, is waiting expectantly for a tip), "let him work". The narrator comments, "Adversity had laid its hand upon him, and at its touch his adolescent heart turned to finer stuff than the salted gold of the Erie Auriferous."¹² The broken spell of the touch of Midas is underlined in an appropriately fairy tale manner: the "angry" water of Tomlinson's Creek destroys the dam of Erie Auriferous; burdocks and thistles cover the "shame" of the mining site. And the genuine Arcadia seems to be re-established when "Nature reached out and drew its coverlet of green over the vanished Eldorado."¹³

A parallel but distorted hope of regeneration runs through the next sketches, "The Yahi Bahi Oriental Society" and "The Love Story of Peter Spillikins", but it is only an ironic hope because the regeneration sought is not received. In both sketches, con-artists prey upon the idle rich who aspire to a higher or deeper purpose, a transcendence of their hollow and synthetic Arcadia. In "The Yahi Bahi Oriental Society", Mr. Rasselyer Brown, (the blunt, plain business man who achieves his "transcendence" through drinking and who is considered an embarrassing "drag" by his wife because he doesn't "*do anything*" but run a coal and wood business) becomes the ironic norm against which his

wife and her coterie are measured. In Veblen's terms, this coterie would be an illustration of the deliberately unproductive and conspicuous consumption of time, an illustration of the leisured class removing itself as far from the workaday world as possible. Leacock's contempt is apparent as the narrator declares that the Rasselyer Brown soirees provided "the kind of cultivated home where people of education and taste are at liberty to talk about things they don't know, and to utter freely ideas they haven't got". The genesis of *The Oriental Society* is very precisely attributed to the "general ennui" which occurs at that time of the year when it is "too early to go to Europe, and too late to go to Bermuda . . . too warm to go south, and yet still too cold to go north."¹⁴ And so the women who are the most leisured of all (except for the wealthy but unemployable enthusiast Spillikins and the pensioned and garrulous Judge Longerstill and the man of letters Mr. Snoop) become the dupes of the two fake East-Indians, two ex-convicts, who are sharp-witted variations of business men like Fyshe, Boomer and Furlong Sr. Apart from the double-edged satire upon achieving the "higher indifference" through the oriental mystic discipline and particularly through gold — note that the fake orientals declare gold to be the "seat of the three virtues — beauty, wisdom and grace" and that "anyone who has enough gold, plain gold, is endowed with these virtues and is all right. All that is needed is to have enough of it"¹⁵ — apart from this satiric revelation of "indifference" (Brahminism) being the product of both the Western leisured class and the Eastern mystics, much of the humour of this sketch is founded upon its transformation from a parodied detective story into a pseudo-mystery story. The women never really do seem to understand that the whole occurrence was an elaborate hoax meant to pick their purses, and instead they remain preoccupied with the shadowy apparition of Mr. Rasselyer Brown who bumbles into their soiree for a night cap and drinks the ritual offering to the God, Buddha. Only Mrs. Rasselyer Brown seems to know what has happened, but she maintains "appearance" through pseudo-oriental logic: "For after all if it was not Buddha, who was it?"¹⁶

In "The Love Story of Mr. Peter Spillikins", Leacock oddly combines pathos and savage farce. Peter Spillikins is hardly one of the consciously callous Pluturians who have achieved that "higher" indifference which permits a deliberate overlooking of the slums that lie beyond the Mausoleum club, but Spillikins *is* one of those ineffectual people who are "all-right" because they or their fathers possess the requisite

amount of money. Spillikins is so short sighted, however, with regard to the opposite sex that he is shown living in a fool's paradise: he possessed the "heavenly gift of short sight. As a consequence he lived in a world of amazingly beautiful women. And as his mind focused in the same way as his eyes, he endowed them with all the virtue and graces which ought to adhere to fifty dollar flowered hats and cerise parasols with ivory handles."¹⁷ To cut his story short: with his eyes out of focus, he overlooks the wholesome girl obviously "meant" to be his wife, Norah, Leacock's "little girl in green", related surely to that redemptive coverlet of green which wipes out the trace of the mine on Tomlinson's property. Norah obviously in her loving worship of Spillikins offers a natural anchor for him, but she remains unseen in the same way that the fields and the natural forest setting are not seen by Spillikins and the other Plutorians as they move through the "lower" fields up to the "enchanted country" of private property and "magic castles". And as Leacock says whimsically and yet with tragic implication, ". . . such is the contrariety of human beings, he had no eyes for her at all."¹⁸

What Spillikins does "value" and pursue is Mrs. Everleigh. His "luxurious consciousness of the unobtainable"¹⁹ (i.e., Mrs. Everleigh) sounds like a Veblenesque variation of "worth" having no relation to "value". And so despite the unnoticed tears welling in the eyes of Norah and despite the *near* tragic realisation of "what might have been [rising] unformed and inarticulate."²⁰ as he leaves Norah, Spillikins in his headlong rush becomes the victim of the predatory Mrs. Everleigh. The removal of Norah to a "darkened drawing-room of a dull little house on a shabby street"²¹ during the Spillikins-Everleigh, wedding, and the dramatic irony of Spillikins' son being heard to say "Hold on, father, you had your shot"²² as they play pool — these light touches indicate a humour which is neither satirical nor indulgent, but a humour which points to the tragic loss of *real* human roots.

Savage satirical farce, however, is the most obvious vein in the Spillikins' story, especially in Leacock's caricature of the Newberries in their "country" retreat. Their return to "pure nature", their "roughing it", becomes a violent farce pointing to modern man's insensitive and brutal mastery of nature — the crowning irony being that Newberry sees himself conforming to nature's order. Living the "simple life" means really a violent remaking of nature. Nature, herself, then, through ironic inversion, "spreads" *her* "oiled roads" and "way side inns". Absolute "isolation" in primeval nature means ten or fifteen country mansions in

close proximity, fifteen miles of paved road, a wilderness privately owned, a gem of a lake "from nature's workshop" raised ten feet and stone-banked.²³ As happens so often, Leacock's enthusiastic "absolutes" which are mouthed from the lips of his "heroes" are so qualified by exceptions or ironically inverted illustrations, that they become totally discredited.

But what is one to make of the violence of Newberry as he madly attempts to recreate "pure nature"? Is Leacock in his wildly kinetic language merely mimicking the mad extravagance of his caricatured "hero"? To take a general example: they were perpetually busy walking about the grounds of Castel Casteggio, *blowing* up things with dynamite, *throwing* steel bridges over gullies, and *hoisting* heavy timber with derricks." More particularly: Mr. Newberry asks his wife in a domestic scene which smacks of a watercoloured dusk, "Margaret, come over here and tell me if you don't think we might *cut* down this elm, *tear* the stump out by the roots, and *throw* it into the ravine." Leacock adds, "Before they came back, the dusk had grown to darkness, and they had redynamited half the estate."²⁴ What are we to make of this extravagance of action and diction? Obviously, in the first place, laughter. But it seems to me as well that Leacock is representing the Newberries in their "country" retreat, the Plutorians in the "Arcadian" retreat of the Mausoleum club, to be suffering the same loss of a natural anchor which Spillikins only dimly apprehends. The separation from genuine roots accounts for the desperate violence of these "cottage folk" to recreate nature, and accounts for the uncritical foolishness of the Yahi Bahi ladies who allow themselves to be conned in their attempt to transcend or escape their rootless condition.

Just as nature and love are not allowed to be refuges from the effects of the pecuniary culture, so the church becomes no refuge. Any reader might laugh at Leacock's incongruous mixing of the language of Christianity with the language of business, the very idea of church union achieved through the legal and administrative machinery of a business merger, but surely much of the laughter elicited is to be accounted for by Leacock's and the reader's unspoken agreement that the church should at least act as a countervailing institution against the predominant commercial institutions. Leacock does declare ironically that in the Lenten service the rector inveighs "against the sins of a commercial age", but the only chagrin the businessmen feel is over lost mergers, "mergers they should have made, and real estate they failed to buy for

lack of faith.”²⁵ The irony of the two chapters “The Rival Churches of St. Asaph and St. Osoph” and “The Ministrations of Reverend Uttermost Dumfarthing” is that the business men do bring about a merger of St. Osoph’s and St. Asaph’s in which financial differences are major concerns and doctrinal differences only an afterthought. By the end where doctrine is no longer “the only remaining obstacle to a union of the churches”, “external punishment” is declared “valid” but “if displeasing to a majority of the holders of bonds” it can be “freely altered, amended, reversed or entirely abolished at a general annual meeting!”²⁶ The questionable democracy then of a shareholder’s meeting replaces the weight of tradition, the authority of the clergyman as custodian and interpreter of that tradition, and any assumption that there might be a permanent spiritual force manifest in a united body of believers. At this point the values of the plutocracy would seem to have displaced entirely the Christian ethic, an erosion foreshadowed in the earlier comic confusion of Rev. Furlong and his father, as they attempt to balance the books of St. Asaph’s Church: says the business man bible-hawker to his son, “You would never make an accountant . . . Here, for example, you put down Distribution of Coals to the Poor to your credit. In the same way, Bibles and Prizes to the Sunday School you again mark to your credit. Why? Don’t you see my boy that these things are debits.” The absolute difference between the Christian ethic of charity and the business ethic of profit is sharpened further: “anything which we give out without return or reward we count as a debit; all that we take from others without giving in return we count as so much to our credit.”²⁷ This, if we can call it the doctrine of the new “religion”, is the primary article of faith of the Plutorians who are almost entirely unaffected by the old religion. As Furlong Sr. says, betraying himself once again as he characteristically shifts back and forth from one official role to another and as he worries about the church not making a profit on the Foreign Missions Account: “I am only asking you, is it worth it? Mind you, I am not speaking now as a Christian, but as a businessman. Is it worth it?”²⁸

Like classic monopolists then who recognise that competition can produce an excess of “goods” and thereby low prices and low profit, the businessmen of the two churches bring about a merger of the two enterprises. Says Mr. Fyshe: “we have here practically the same situations we had with two rum distilleries — the output is too large for the demand.” What follows is both Fyshe’s ironic recognition of the

incongruity of his own statement and Leacock's larger irony at the expense of Fyshe: "One could hardly compare a mere church to a thing of the magnitude and importance of the Standard Oil Company".²⁹ The point is that to the Plutorians the two institutions *are* the same thing, only with the church being on a lesser scale.

The story then moves to ironic resolution, the merger of the Presbyterian St. Osophs and the Episcopalian St. Asaphs is amplified by the marriages of the widower, Rev. Dumfarthing, to the rector's sister, Julia Furlong; and Catherine Dumfarthing, the minister's daughter, to the rector, Rev. Edward Furlong. Even the Episcopalian rooks and the Presbyterian crows are shown in absurd union as they periodically exchange trees and perches. Again an ironic divine harmony is suggested when McTeague, the former minister of St. Osophs, is virtually brought back to life, paralysis of the brain having so cleared his head that "intellectual problems which occasion the greatest perplexity before present no difficulty whatever afterwards".³⁰ The story becomes even more ironically harmonious when McTeague returns to the post vacated by Dumfarthing who has felt a "calling" to take up another church post at a higher salary. The elders at St. Asaphs then in their attempt to save their church enterprise from the more "efficient" or "productive" preaching of St. Osoph's Dumfarthing are gulled by their Presbyterian counterparts who have kept the fact of their departing preacher a secret. The church union then becomes simply another tricky con job.

The same is true of "The Fight for Clean Government". As said earlier, Leacock's hope of solving the inequities of the capitalistic economy was through the countervailing power of government legislation. But in *Arcadian Adventures* the great wave of public morality demanding government reform would seem, if not to have its source in the Mausoleum Club, at least to have its direction given by the Club. Democracy or the will of the people becomes something decided a priori behind closed doors by plutocrats who once they knew "exactly what they wanted" would "invite freest advice from all cases in the city".³¹ The bland diplomatic language is mimicked so successfully by Leacock that the hypocrisy might well be overlooked by the unwary reader. Similarly the uncritical reader might be conned by the crazy self-justifying logic of the plutocrats: "As long as you only pay fifteen hundred you get your council filled up with men who will do any kind of crooked work for fifteen hundred dollars; as soon as you pay ten

thousand you get men with larger ideas". The moral righteousness of the wealthy speaker accounts for some of the humour, but the further suggestion of there being really no moral consideration whatsoever makes it even more humorous: in context, "larger ideas" imply only crooks who have more ambitious schemes than their small time counterparts. What is more unsettling about his last sketch in *Arcadian Adventures* is not that each major participant in the campaign for clean government gets his monopolistic reward, not that the head of the previous crooked administration allies himself with them, not that the newspapers can be bought outright to guarantee an "unbiased press". These particular abuses have been hinted at through the whole book. What has not been shown so explicitly, however, is the nightmare possibility of a state in which every institution is dominated by the rich. Not only, however, is a totalitarian state implied, but a fascist state, where the Students Fair Play League put down "hoodlism" (or free opposition) by upsetting streetcars and a milkwagon, where through physical violence they eliminate alternative candidates in the election, and where "In the lower part of the town scores of willing workers, recruited often from the humblest classes, kept order with pickaxes". Leacock's ironically mild parody of the euphemisms which probably would be employed to justify goon squads cuts several ways. First, those who would have the most to lose by the absolute rule of the rich, i.e., the workers or the unemployed, are co-opted by the rich. Secondly, in the world of plutonia there is no hope of a proletarian revolution as prophesied by Fyshe in "The Little Dinner" let alone any general strike for the improvement of living conditions. Instead, there is to be only the maintenance of the status quo, the restoration of the synthetic Arcadia ("tyrole flutes through the rubber trees" of the Mausoleum club), and the guarantee of the franchise of the Citizen's Light so that each shareholder can get his "fair" return on his investment over a *200 year period*.

Leacock closes this last sketch on deliberately soft notes, imitating in his language the complacent attitude of the "shepherds and shepherdesses" who have triumphed over the "powers of darkness" and who proclaim their "good tidings" of victory through the soft notes of car horns. What they proclaim is a false "salvation of the city". Leaving the artificially muted light of the Club, coming out into the natural but "cheap prosaic glare" of daylight they go to their "well-earned sleep". The ironically distorted echo of resurrection or salvation is

accomplished by Leacock as the rest of the city "rose to their daily toil".³⁴ The savage indignation of this irony, the damning of his adversaries through their own kind of feelings and words, approaches the sharpness of that parody of man's inhumanity to man found in Swift's *Modest Proposal*.

Savage indignation and biting irony are not of course the whole story. It is useful to remember Tomlinson's going back home, Tomlinson as the ironic norm by which the plutocracy is measured, and it is useful to relate Tomlinson to the people found in the small town of Mariposa in *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*. Even this nostalgic recollection, however, of what Veblen might have called the quasi-peaceful society which precedes the predatory culture of the hunter-warrior and the industrialist is not without barbed point. Leacock is all too well aware that the Mariposans ape the big-city ways albeit rather unsuccessfully, and that they aspire mightily to "size" as they are forever inflating the census figures from the official five thousand to the agreed ten thousand. Much of the ironic humour of this work emanates from Leacock's similar (but conscious) inflation of Lilliputian perspective into Brobdignagian perspective. To the sophisticated metropolitan eyes the sun-drenched streets seem small and quiet but this "standard is all astray". In six months, says the town voice and yet sophisticated voice (allowing his irony to cut in both directions at once), "the buses roar and hum in the station; the trains shriek; the traffic multiplies; the people move faster and faster; a dense crowd swirls to and fro in the post office and the five and ten cent store — and amusements . . . why after a few months of residence you begin to realise that the place is a mere mad round of gaiety."³⁵ Speaking in the small-town voice for the moment, the narrator assumes ironically the small town's uncritical belief in bigness and progress, and at the same time he betrays the shrill, violent intensity of that society.

And yet *Sunshine Sketches* like *Arcadian Adventures* is strangely devoid of real progressive action; the stories, or better, the sketches move to resolutions which are really a return only to the starting point or a return to inactivity. Therefore, just as one can see Tomlinson returning to his farm and McTeague returning to his pulpit after his stroke in *Arcadian Adventures*, the financial speculator Jefferson Thorpé returns to his barber shop; Dean Drone returns to his restored church and to the fresh-eyes innocence of the Sunday School; Peter Pupkin returns from his "heroic" exploits of saving the bank's money

and from "certain" death to marry Zena Pepperleigh and to live in the "enchanted" house on the hill. And Josh Smith who would appear to be the genuine hero of the book shrewdly solves every problem, profits from every near catastrophe, and yet unlike the Pluturians of *Arcadian Adventures* seems content, despite his boisterous dress and his slick ways, to accomplish little more than a return to the previous equilibrium. So, using the big-city institutions of a "caff" a "rats cooler", a French chef and twenty-five cent meals, and the promise of a "girl's room", the illiterate frontiersman from the North, Josh Smith, bribes his townsmen until a "spontaneous" petition restores his liquor licence to him. He not only becomes the Conservative candidate, his policy of not opening the big-city "girls room" shrewdly conforms to the conservative values of the small town — "Well, you know how sensitive opinion is in a place like Mariposa."³⁶ In the "Speculations of Jefferson Thorpe", the doggedness of the stubborn and naive Thorpe is ridiculed by Leacock and the whole mad stampede into the Timmins silver rush: only Smith is sharp-eyed and cool-headed enough to make money out of the whole comedy of errors as he sends fifteen carloads of potatoes North at a profit of five dollars a bag. Thorpe by contrast returns with empty pockets to the somnolent quiet of his barber shop and the sound of his wife's hens cackling (or laughing) behind the barber shop.

The "Sinking of the Mariposa Bell" presents another pseudo-event (what appears to be a major disaster in the small town) as the lake steamer sinks in six feet of water. Leacock begins with a lake "as still as glass" and moves to the "dull thud" of the steamer's propeller. The boat, raised from the bottom by Smith, is returned to the town dock amid a congratulatory hail of sparks and the cheers of the towns people. The narrator's recall of the census taker at this dramatic point — "if only the federal census taker could count us now!" — and the playing of O Can-a-da celebrate ironically the consolidation of this small town (despite itself) into a happy united family under the shrewd eyes of Smith who permits them to cope without really changing. Further, Leacock's mangling of the story, his protesting that he doesn't know how to get it going on a straight line, his shuffling protest that he had not meant to mislead the reader into thinking this was to be a major crisis — "Oh pshaw! I was not talking about a steamer sinking in the ocean and carrying down its screaming crowds in the hideous depths of green water. Oh, dear me, no! That kind of thing never happens on

Lake Wissanotti"³⁷ — this kind of calmness and deliberate artificiality also serves to emphasize once again the unreality of change or progress in Mariposa. And perhaps it indicates incidentally why Leacock could not be a genuine teller of short stories or novels: action is really insignificant to him.

Even Dean Drone who is the victim of a mangled apocalyptic rhetoric, an optimistic faith in New Jerusalem or Judaic Christian progress, illustrates once again the essential changelessness of Mariposa:

. . . it was only a matter of time before [the debt] would be extinguished; only a little effort was needed, a little girding up of the loins of the congregation and they would shoulder the whole debt and trample it under their feet. Let them but set their hands to the plough and they could soon guide it into the deep water. Then they might furl their sails and sit every man under his own olive tree.³⁸

Like his language itself, Drone is made to appear most ineffectual, a strange amalgam of the antiquarian and mechanic who blames his failures to balance the church books or build proper model airplanes upon the professor who failed to teach him mathematics years before. And Drone's supporters fail using big-city techniques to raise money — the pyramid letter which never returns all the dimes to the church, the whirlwind campaign in which the canvassers exceed those canvassed. They fail because there *is* an essential difference between life in the *small* town and life in the large city. Only Smith seems to make a profit from all the campaign meetings which are held at his hotel, and only Smith seems capable of unsnarling the Gordian knot through the direct and simple act of burning down the over-insured church. Thus the church is restored free of debt and a blow (as Judge Pepperleigh sees it) is struck against the big city corporation when the insurance company is forced to pay up.

The next section of *Sunshine Sketches* is taken over almost entirely by Peter Pupkin who in his wealth, his innocence and his fondness for his heroine is reminiscent of Peter Spillikins of *Arcadian Adventures*. In a shadowy shoot-out with the bank janitor, Pupkin by accident becomes the town hero as he is seen to have saved the bank's money, but more importantly it is a pseudo-heroism which permits him to approach Zena Pepperleigh as a quasi-chevalier, and a pseudo-heroism which allows them to enter like dreamers into matrimony while maintaining their romantic illusions when in fact they are no more than the bourgeois

progenitors of the small town. Perhaps I take the story too seriously, but Leacock is forever inflating their love into something predestined, forever undercutting the "reality" of their love by attributing it to too many romance novels and too much leisure, and forever mangling the dramatic unity of his love story — so much so that it is difficult not to be disturbed by the intensity and yet vacuity of their "enchanted" experience.

The book, however, is not permitted to close as an ironic bourgeois romance. It ends with the successful political campaign of Josh Smith, a man who points the voters to the mutual advantage to be had through his election (what Edward Drone sees to be "graft" or "bribery"), a man who deliberately throws around economic abstractions and statistics with such abandon that everyone finally desists from using this spurious authority, and a man who for the sake of parochial mutual advantage supports the Conservative protective tariff against Liberal reciprocity. What Smith finally achieves is a position where he *knows* there is no more to be said during his next four years of elected office. In these closing chapters of the book, Leacock is alluding explicitly to the preoccupations of the professional economist (i.e., tariffs and statistics), but these concerns have little more purpose than to reveal the acuteness of mind of the pragmatic entrepreneur who has no need for the theories of good government or good political economy but who instead can see quickly where the immediate and long term advantage lie. If there be any point beyond this, it is perhaps that protective tariffs, a small restricted economy and conservatism, correspond neatly with the fact of small-town life in Mariposa.

Leacock then seems to place his faith in this small-town type, an almost primitivist faith in the untutored and pragmatic entrepreneur, a faith in a man who could intuitively find his own advantage while incidentally finding the collective advantage of others. In all this, there is a presentation of an exploiter who can see his limits, who has no inclination to extend those limits at the expense of others, and who is finally not altogether different from Dean Drone who sits in his garden, in the chequered sunlight, musing half asleep — his white hair, the white plum blossoms, and the white skull becoming together one of those still, small points in time which so intrigue Wordsworth and Leacock. In *Sunshine Sketches* then Leacock has managed in his sketches to freeze time, to contain action. And in "L'envoi", the reflective epilogue, Leacock transforms the image of a train returning to

Mariposa to no more than a train of nostalgic memory proceeding from the mind of one of those Mariposans who has remained attached to his roots while becoming one of those big city Plutorians who rest and muse and work out of the Mausoleum club.

In *Arcadian Adventures* then one can see Leacock's attack upon the abuses of the modern pecuniary society, his cynical elaboration of Veblen's critique of the plutocracy. In *Sunshine Sketches*, one can see more clearly Leacock's basic sceptical conservatism, his penchant for smallness or limitation: it is this norm which finally makes Leacock's critique of modern society very different from Veblen's — and possibly very Canadian.

NOTES

1. Donald Cameron, *Faces of Leacock* (Toronto, 1969), p. 9
2. Stephen Leacock, *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* (Toronto, 1920), p. 53
3. Stephen Leacock, *Arcadian Adventures Among the Idle Rich* (Toronto, 1969), p. 95
4. *The Unsolved Riddle*, pp. 27-28
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-152
6. *Arcadian Adventures*, p. 1. (italics mine)
7. *Ibid.* pp. 20-21 (italics mine)
8. *Ibid.*, p. 12
9. *Ibid.*, p. 25
10. *Ibid.*, p. 29
11. *Ibid.*, p. 35
12. *Ibid.*, p. 53
13. *Ibid.*, p. 55
14. *Ibid.*, p. 62
15. *Ibid.*, p. 72
16. *Ibid.*, p. 77
17. *Ibid.*, p. 79
18. *Ibid.*, p. 91
19. *Ibid.*, p. 96
20. *Ibid.*, p. 98
21. *Ibid.*, p. 99
22. *Ibid.*, p. 100
23. *Ibid.*, p. 85
24. *Ibid.*, p. 95 (italics mine)
25. *Ibid.*, p. 101
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 133-135
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113
28. *Ibid.*, p. 114
29. *Ibid.*, p. 130
30. *Ibid.*, p. 136
31. *Ibid.*, p. 147
32. *Ibid.*, p. 153
33. *Ibid.*, p. 156
34. *Ibid.*, p. 157
35. Stephen Leacock, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (Toronto, 1965), p. 3
36. *Ibid.*, p. 21
37. *Ibid.*, p. 49
38. *Ibid.*, p. 62