

ceive a great crowd of people opposite the blacksmith's shop, neither she, nor Mrs. Williams, next door, who stood staring with all her eyes, could ascertain the cause of it.

For some time before this, Peggy Mullens had heard a dull, heavy sound, thumping in her ears, and could not, for the life of her, make out what it could be.

In a few minutes, however the crowd gave way, and a man, dressed in a cocked hat and loose great coat, carrying in one hand a long staff, and with the other leading a shaggy brown bear by the chain, advanced slowly up the middle of the road, followed by, at least, half the population of the village, some of whom, more cautious than the rest, kept at a respectful distance from the muzzled bear, who strode lazily along after his master.

A half starved looking stripling marched by the side of the bear, with a tabor and pipe, and so heartily did he blow the pipe, and so lustily did he beat the tabor, that it excited a strong disposition among many of the spectators to shuffle with their feet as though they were dancing.

The man leading the bear looked hard at the houses as he passed by, but did not make a stand, till he came opposite the Red Lion, which is the only public house in the village; then, clearing a circle in the crowd, he shouted to the bear, who immediately reared up on his hind legs; he then brandished the staff over the head of the animal, making him move round sideways, forming a circle the full length of the chain. While the bear awkwardly lifted up his uncouth legs in obedience to the command given him, the keeper took off his cocked hat, and placed it on Bruin's head; this much amused the spectators, who laughed immoderately at the droll figure before them.

The old man, who belonged to the bear, used such strange expressions, and had such a comical cast of countenance, that he was almost as great a curiosity as the animal he exhibited: altogether his visit to Hopfield was a very pleasant affair to the people of the village.

Now it happened that a clever ventriloquist, who was on his way to a neighbouring town, had called at the Red Lion. Much entertained, not only with the bear and his master, but also by the wonder and amazement of the crowd, which he had observed from a window of the inn; he resolved, by way of joke, to exercise his skill as a ventriloquist, little doubting that if he could once make the people believe that the bear could speak, he should soon be able to spread alarm and confusion among them.

Accordingly he mingled in the throng, and waited for an opportunity to put his scheme in practice.

Just as he came up, the keeper called out to the bear, in a very harsh voice, commanding him to hold the staff which he presented, at the same time flinging the chain and order-

ing him to lift up his head, Bruin hugged the staff with his forepaws, and uttered a growl, which made some of the people who stood nearest to him shrink back, Scarcely had he again commenced his rounds when the ventriloquist told the stripling to stop his tabor and pipe for a minute or two, and walking up to the bear called out, "Well, my old boy! and what country do you come from?" A voice appearing to proceed from the bear, gruffly replied, "From the Alps in Germany." It would be idle to attempt any description of the amazement of the crowd; they stood gaping with wonder, while the keeper seemed more surprised than any of them; for, lifting up his large eyebrows, and opening his wide mouth, he stood as though his feet had taken root in the ground.

"And can you speak English well?" said the ventriloquist, again addressing the bear. "As well as you can," was the reply. At this moment the crowd began again to shuffle a foot or two further from the bear, whom they regarded with fear as well as wonder.

"And how have mankind used you?" shouted out the ventriloquist. "Most cruelly," replied a growling voice, "and now I will be revenged on you all." At these words the ventriloquist turned round and ran as if for his life; the horrified keeper gave a jerk to the chain which brought down the bear so suddenly on his feet, that all around doubted not the animal was about to spring upon them. O the scene of consternation! it took place at that moment! the whole throng of spectators, without waiting a moment to deliberate, rushed back in the greatest terror. Hats, bonnets, handkerchiefs, and shawls, fell to the ground; and the affrighted people, conceiving that in another moment they might be torn in pieces, took to their heels in all directions, bawling, screaming, and spreading out their arms as though they were wings to aid them in their flight.

Ned Taylor pushed among the crowd pell-mell, and was over a stile hard by in a brace of minutes; but old fat Nanny, who could hardly make a run of it, shuffled along in the greatest fright imaginable, feeling sure that if any one was overtaken by the bear, it would certainly be herself.

Young Barnet ran some distance like a greyhound, but his toe caught a stone, and down he fell on all fours. At any other time he would have yelped at such an accident, like a cur that has been kicked, and blubbered for ten minutes without quitting the place, but the fear of being devoured gave him wondrous powers of endurance, and surprising dexterity in helping himself, so that he was presently upon his legs again, setting off at full speed without stopping to rub the dirt from his breeches knees. Poor old Humphrey Stevens thought it was all over with him, for his lame leg kept him far behind the rest: he hobbled along with all his might, and would, willingly, have given his Sunday red waistcoat to be safe in his

own house. Peggy Mullens had not ventured near enough to the bear to know the cause of the general consternation, but no sooner did she see her neighbours run in all directions, than, without stopping a moment to inquire, she made towards the cottage with as much expedition as if she had been shot at, tumbling up the broken stone steps, and bustling through the wicket gate in such a flurry, that, as she afterwards declared, she knew no more what she was about than the man in the moon.

The joke of the ventriloquist soon got abroad, and many a hearty laugh it occasioned. Some of the villagers were surprised that any body should have been foolish enough to be frightened; others said it was enough to frighten the boldest man in England. One wondered at his neighbour, and another was astonished at himself.

The landlord of the Red Lion never fails to tell the tale of the dancing bear to every stranger who enters his front parlour; but though the landlord and his guests, and all the inhabitants of the village of Hopfield believe that it was the ventriloquist, and not the bear, that threatened revenge: old Gammer Griffith, at the thatched cottage, near the mile stone, is of a different opinion. She had read in her almanack, that about the middle of June, three days before or three days after, something remarkable would happen, and I question if the writer of the almanack were to appear before her, whether he could persuade her to believe that the prediction had no allusion to the dancing bear. Whenever the affair is spoken of she shakes her head incredulously at the tale of the ventriloquist, and says, it may answer people's ends to hush up the matter, but, for her part, she knows "what is what," and that so sure as her name is Margery Griffith, the village will again be visited by the Dancing Bear.

#### THOUGHTS ON THE TIMES.

The gay, beautiful and ever welcome months of Summer are gone, and the months of Autumn have begun to take their place. Our Summer movements are fast closing—our Summer journeyings are passing away,—the travelling invalid and belle of fashion, now wend their way homeward. Our merry meetings upon land and water, our annual visits, our assemblies under the open canopy of heaven, our sailing excursions, our night wanderings—all will soon be over. To be sure, Niagara still will thunder, and still there will be the rushing of mighty waters from her magnificent falls, but her music will be music for herself alone. The multitude who have gazed in wonder upon this mighty work of an Omnipotent Architect, will soon be far distant. Two months hence, and the cap and cloak will take the place of our summer apparel. Our Summer breezes will be changed into Autumn winds—the gay and pleasing attire of our green fields and