

rational hour; the "Magnet" at ten in the morning—somewhat of the earliest; whilst the "Wonder" was advertised to start every morning at five precisely!!!—a glaring impossibility. We know, that in our enterprising country, adventures are sometimes undertaken in the spirit of competition, which are entirely out of the common course of things: thus, one man will sell a bottle of blacking for nine-pence, with the charitable intention of ruining his neighbor (so think the worthy public) who has the audacity to charge his at a shilling—the intrinsic value of the commodity being, in either case, a fraction less than five farthings. Such a manœuvre, however, is tolerable; but the attempt to ruin a respectable vehicle, professing to set out on its journey at the reputable hour of three in the afternoon, by pretending to start a coach at five o'clock in the morning, was an imposition "tolerable" only in Dogberry's sense of the word—it was "not to be endured." And then, the downright absurdity of the undertaking!—for admitting that the proprietors might prevail on some poor idiot to act as coachman, where were they to entrap a dozen mad people for passengers? We often experience an irresistible impulse to interfere, in some matter, simply because it happens to be no business of our's; and the case in question being, clearly, no affair of mine, I resolved to inquire into it. I went into the coach-office, expecting to be told, in answer to my very first question, that the advertisement was altogether a *ruse de guerre*.

'So, Sir,' said I, to the book-keeper, 'you start a coach to London, at five in the morning?'

'Yes, Sir,' replied he, and with the most perfect *non-chalance*!

'You understand me? At five?—in the morning,' rejoined I, with an emphasis sufficiently expressive of doubt.

'Yes, sir; five to a minute—two minutes later you will lose your place.'

This exceeded all my notions of human impudence. It was evident I had here an extraordinary mine to work, so I determined upon digging into it a few fathoms deeper.

'And would you, now, venture to book a place for me?'

'Let you know directly, Sir. (I hand down the Wonder Lunnunbook, there.) When for, Sir?'

I stood aghast at the fellow's coolness—'To-morrow.'

'Full outside, Sir; just one place vacant in.'

The very word "outside," bringing forcibly to my mind the idea of ten or a dozen shivering creatures being induced, by any possible means, to perch themselves on the top of a coach, on a dark, dull, dingy, drizzling morning in January, confirmed me in my belief that the whole affair was, what is vulgarly called, 'a take-in.'

'So you will venture to book a place for me?'

'Yes, Sir, if you please.'

'And, perhaps, you will go so far as to receive half my fare?'

'If you please, Sir,—one pound two.'

'Well, you are an extraordinary person! Perhaps, now—pray be attentive—perhaps, now, you will carry on the thing so far as to receive the whole?'

'If you please, Sir—two pound four'

I paid him the money; observing at the same time, and in a tone calculated to impress his imagination with a vivid picture of attorneys, counsel, judge, and jury,—'you shall hear from me again.'

'If you please, Sir; to-morrow morning, at five punctual—start to a minute, Sir—thank'ee, Sir—good morning, Sir.' And this he uttered without a blush.

'To what expedients,' thought I as I left the office, 'will men resort for the purpose of injuring their neighbours. Here is one who exposes himself to the consequence of an action at law, or, at least, to the expense of sending me to town, in a chaise and four, at a reasonable hour of the day; and all for so paltry an advantage as that of preventing my paying a trifling sum to a rival proprietor—and on the preposterous pretence, too, of sending me off at five in the morning!'

The first person I met was my friend, Mark Norrington, and—

Even now, though months have since rolled over my head, I shudder at the recollection of the agonies I suffered, when as-