

A DINNER IN THE TEMPLE. (FROM BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE.)

CHAP. I.

HOW WE WENT TO DINE AT JACK GINGER'S.

So it was finally agreed upon that we should dine at Jack Ginger's chambers in the Temple, seated in a lofty story in Essex-court. There was, besides our host, Tom Meggot, Joe Macgillicuddy, Humpy Harlow, Bob Burke, Anthony Harrison, and myself. As Jack Ginger had little coin and no credit we contributed each our share to the dinner. He himself provided room, fire, candle, table, chairs, tablecloth, napkins,—no not napkins; on second thoughts we did not bother ourselves with napkins—plates, dishes, knives, forks, spoons, (which we borrowed from the wig-maker,) tumblers, lemons, sugar, water, glasses, decanters—by the by I am not sure that there were decanters—salt, pepper, vinegar, mustard, bread, butter, (plain and melted,) cheese, radishes, potatoes, and cookery. Tom Meggot was a cod's head and shoulders, and oysters to match; Joe Macgillicuddy, a boiled leg of pork, with peas-pudding; Humpy Harlow, a surlin of roast beef, with horse radish; Bob Burke, a gallon of half-and-half, and four bottles of whiskey, of prime quality, ("Potteen," wrote the Whiskymen, "I say by Jupiter, but of which many-facture, He alone knows;") Anthony Harrison, half a dozen of port, he having tick to that amount at some unfortunate wine-merchant's; and I supplied cigars *à discretion*, and a bottle of rum, which I borrowed from a West Indian friend of mine as I passed by. So that, on the whole, we were in no danger of suffering from any of the extremes of hunger and thirst for the course of that evening.

We met at five o'clock—sharp—and very sharp. Not a man was missing when the clock of the Inner Temple struck the last stroke. Jack Ginger had done everything to admiration. Nothing could be more splendid than his turn-out. He had superintended the cooking himself of every individual dish, with his own eyes, or rather, eye, he having but one, the other having been lost in a skirmish when he was midshipman on board a pirate in the Brazilian service. "Ah!" said Jack, often and often, "these were my honest days; gad, did I ever think when I was a pirate that I was at the end to turn rogue, and study the law." All was accurate to the utmost degree. The tablecloth to be sure, was not exactly white, but it had been washed last week, and the collection of plates was miscellaneous, exhibiting several of the choicest patterns of delf. We were not of the silver fork school of poetry, but steel is not to be despised. If the table was somewhat rickety, the inequality in the legs was supplied by clapping a volume of Vesey under the short one. As for the chairs—but why weary about details—chairs being made to be sat upon, it is sufficient to say, that they answered their purposes, and whether they had backs or not, whether they were cane-bottomed, or hair-bottomed, or rush-bottomed is nothing to the present enquiry.

Jack's habits of discipline made him punctual, and dinner was on the table in less than three minutes after five. Down we

sat, hungry as hunters, and eager for the prey.

"Is there a parson in company?" said Jack Ginger from the head of the table.

"No," responded I from the foot.

"Then thank God," said Jack, and proceeded, after this pious grace, to distribute the cod's head and shoulders to the hungry multitude.

CHAP. II.

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The history of that cod's head and shoulders, would occupy but little space to write. Its flakes, like the flakes on a river, were for one moment bright then gone for ever; it perished unpitably. "Bring hither," said Jack, with a firm voice, "the leg of pork." It appeared, but soon to disappear again. Not a man in the company but showed his abhorrence of the Judaical practice of abstaining from the flesh of swine. Equally clear was it in a few moments that we were truly British in our devotion to beef. The surloin was impartially destroyed on both sides, upper and under. Dire was the clatter of the knives, but deep the silence of the guests. Jerry Gallagher, Jack's valet-de-chambre, footman, cook, clerk, shoeblack, aid-de-camp, scout, confidant, dun-chaser, bum-defyer, and many other offices in *commendam*, toiled like a hero. He covered himself with glory and gravy every minute. In a short time a vociferation arose for fluid, and the half-and-half, Whitbread quartered upon Chamytton, beautiful heraldry!—was inhaled with the most savage satisfaction.

"The pleasure of a glass of wine with you, Bob Burke," said Joe Macgillicuddy, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"With pleasure Joe," replied Bob—"What wine do you choose? You may as well say port, for there is no other; but attention to manners always becomes a gentleman."

"Port then, if you please," cried Joe—"as the ladies of Limerick say, when a man looks at them across the table."

"Hobnobbing wastes time," said Jack Ginger, laying down the pot out of which he had been drinking for the last few minutes; "and besides, it is not customary now in genteel society, so pass the bottle about."

[I here pause in my narrative to state, on more accurate recollection, that we had not decanters; we drank from the black bottle, which Jack declared was the fashion on the continent.]

So the port was passed round, and declared to be superb. Anthony Harrison received the unanimous applause of the company; and if he did not blush at all the fine things that were said in his favour, it was because his countenance was of that peculiar hue, that no addition of red could be visible upon it. A blush on Anthony's face would be like gilding refined gold.

Whether cheese is prohibited or not in the higher circles of the West End, I cannot tell; but I know it was not prohibited in the very highest chambers of the Temple.

"It's double Gloucester," said Jack Ginger; "prime, bought at the corner; Heaven

pay the cheesemonger, for I shan't, but as he is a gentleman, I give you his health."

"I don't think," said Macgillicuddy, "that I ought to demean myself to drink the health of a cheesemonger, but I'll not stop the bottle."

And to do Joe justice, he did not. Then we attacked the cheese, and in an incredibly short period, we battered in a breach of an angle of 45 degrees, in a manner that would have done honour to any engineer that directed the guns at San Sebastian.

With cheese came, and with cheese went, celery. It is unnecessary, to repeat what a number of puns were made, on that most pun-provoking of plants.

"Clear the decks," said Jack Ginger to Jerry Gallagher. "Gentlemen, I did not think of getting pastry, or puddings, or desserts, or ices, or jellies, or blancmange, or anything of the sort, for men of sense like you."

We all unanimously expressed our indignation at being supposed, even for a moment, guilty of any such weakness; but a general suspicion seemed to arise amongst us, that a dram might not be rejected with the same marked scorn. Jack Ginger accordingly uncorked one of Bob Burke's bottles.—Whop! went the cork, and the Potteen soon was seen meandering round the table.

"For my part," said Anthony Harrison, "I take this dram because I ate pork, and I fear it might disagree with me."

"I take it," said Bob Burke, "chiefly by reason of the fish."

"I take it," said Joe Macgillicuddy, "because the day was warm, and it is very close in these chambers."

"I take it," said Tom Meggot, "because I have been very chilly all day."

"I take it," said Humpy Harlow, "because it is such strange weather, that one does not know what to do."

"I take it," said Ginger, "because the rest of the company takes it."

"And I take it," said I, winding up the conversation, "because I like a dram."

So we all took it for one reason or another, and there was an end of that.

"Be off, Jerry Gallagher," said Jack; "I give to you, your heirs, and assigns, all that and those which remain in the pots of half-and-half; item for your own dinner what is left of the solids, and when you have pared the bones clean, you may give them to the poor. Charity covers a multitude of sins. Brush away like a shoeblack, and levant."

"Why thin, God bless your honour," said Jerry Gallagher, "it's a small legacy" he would have that would depend for his daily bread for what is left behind any of you in the way of drink; and this blessed hour there's not as much as would blind the left eye of a midge in one of them pots; and may it do you all good, if it an't the blessing of heaven to see you eating. By my soul, he that has to pick after you, won't be much troubled with the mate. Howsomenever!"

"No more prate," said Ginger. "Here's two-pence for you to buy some beer; but, no," he continued, drawing his empty hand from the breeches-pocket into which he had most needlessly put it, "no," said he, "Jer-