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THE PIMENTO FAMILY:

OR, SPOILED CHILDREN.

By Theodore Hook.

Sir Peter Pimento is an eminent West India merchant, remarkable for coolness of temper both as merchant and husband; Lady P. (erewhile Miss Penelope Harpoon, and daughter of a Greenland trader) is, on the contrary, remarkable for a sort of pepperiness of temper, which acquired her the reputation of a vixen whilst yet a mere minx, a virago when a virgin, a Xantippe now she is a wife. Her absolute "shall" was a flat not to be contravened in Lothbury during her maidenage, nor in Finsbury-square, in her wifeage, at least by beings bearing as little gall about them as the humble and peace-loving Sir Peter. If clerk or cook, house-maid or nurse-maid, exhibited the slightest spice of opposition to the home-administration, the house was dissolved *sine die*, and the malcontents sent to find new constituents, if they could.

Sir Peter, in the three preparatory years of his wedded infelicity, was, on three several occasions, made happy, though exceedingly incommode, by the production of two sons and a daughter, to be the olive-branches of his table. A hundred humble names were, with all proper submission, suggested by Sir Peter, as cognomens for the crude Pimentos, but were all and severally overruled by the absolute "It shall not be" of his lady; and, accordingly, young Pimento, No. 1, was christened Alfred; No. 2, Augustus; and No. 3, Amarantha, because she had been pronounced by Mrs. Deputy Dogrose (who was cultivating Botany) to be the flower of the Pimentos. Sir Peter would have preferred the plain English triumvirate of John, George, and Betty; but when he muttered, rather than audibly expressed, his "three wishes" on that important head, a dilatation of the nostrils, and a frown, put down the ineffectual opposition; and the quiet loving merchant succumbed away from the pertinaciousness of his spouse to the price-current and the averages of rums, sugars, gingers, and arrow-roots.

Twelve years passed, and the young Pimentos really began to grow "very interesting" at the dinner-parties with which the hospitable merchant entertained his friends during school vacations, that the juveniles might see something of the world and the world see something of the juveniles. Master Alfred could rant the soliloquies in "Douglas," and to show the versatility of his genius, play "Little Pickle," with an additional scene (got up by Lady Pimento herself, who began to betray symptoms of *bleu-ism*), in which he set fire to a chintz curtain, broke some china chimney-ornaments, upset a dumb-waiter, and fired a cracker under the chair of his indulgent papa. The city parties who were made audiences of his pranks pronounced him to be a prodigy—in mischief: Lady P. was delighted, while the "judicious" Sir Peter grieved.

Master Augustus was also a prodigy, but in another line. He could hit the house-cat on the nose with a blunt arrow five times out of ten, and strike an egg out of a breakfast cup once out of twice, if he did not break both cup and egg at the first fire. It was, indeed, prophesied by the sporting part of the city that he must ultimately become one of the first shots of his day.

Miss Amarantha was the third prodigy—a musical and metrical prodigy. In her eleventh summer she could make verses; and in her twelfth marry metre to music, though, like most early marriages, they jangled most deplorably. Her master, Signor Soprano, pronounced her, as well as he could express his flattery, to be "A Malibran in the butt (bud;)" and her ladyship, as sugars were "looking up," raised the professor's salary half a guinea per quarter.

Under the instruction of the Signor, Miss Amarantha had already begun to scream out "sounds it was misery to hear," and thump the piano in such a manner as was barbarous to behold. *Dipiacer*, and *Una voce poco fa*, filled the town house in Finsbury with "discords dire," the superflux half filling the area forming the square, and frightening that merchant-congregating spot "from its propriety." Lady P., however, and her *coterie* were delighted to observe the devotion with which the young lady went through the rudimentary martyrdom of her musical education.

I have foredated a principal incident in my history; for it was at this time that Peter Pimento, Esquire, became Sir Peter Pimento, Knight. He had been elected Sheriff of London: an address of congratulation about something procured him the intoxicating honour of knighthood. Then it was that the Pimentos "looked up;" and Sir Peter, after much special pleading, for the sake of that peace, of which, as sheriff, he was a public conservator, reluctantly agreed that a more fashionable house, and a more fashionable neighborhood were necessary to the double

dignities of Sheriff and knight. Accordingly the Pimentos migrated to Portland Place. Sir Peter, however, soon discovered that such a residence was too far from the city for commerce, and too near the city for country air. One horn of this dilemma was soon gilt over: Lady P. insisted upon a second carriage. The merchant demurred, but in vain: it was ordered from Birch, the fashionable coach-builder; and Lady P. and Miss Amarantha kept it in activity,—first, by shopping expeditions about the West End, in the morning,—and, secondly, by putting in appearances at the Park two hours before dinner. Sir Peter complained, and was told he could well afford a third carriage, for gingers were brisk. "Anything for a quiet life," thought Sir P. and a third carriage was put on the stocks. Lady P. then discovered that her "dear Alfred" could not positively be seen with the young sprigs of nobility with whom he had bowed himself into acquaintanceship, if he was not allowed a cabriolet. Here Sir Peter did venture to rebel so far as to lift his eyebrows in astonishment; and a "Plague it, madam, this is too much!" and a positive "No!" had half-escaped his lips, when the lady informed him, in her peremptory way, that opposition was useless—it was necessary to the dignity of the family; she had ordered Birch to build a cabriolet for the "dear boy!" and, if Sir Peter refused the expense, she would sustain it out of her private purse, for she was determined that "the Pimentos should look up." Sir Peter gave an audible "hamp!" whistled a variation on a favourite air; and then, buttoning up his coat to the collar, walked as coolly as he could to Cornhill. Fortunately for his peace of mind, good tidings from Lloyd's met him there; and he began to think it not impossible that a merchant, whose profits were twenty thousand per annum, might sustain the rise in the demands of Lady P. and her "dear Alfred." But he had, for the hour, forgotten that he had also a "dear Augustus." The last-named young gentleman had lately made a match with the Hon. Mr. Wisgigeon, and, presuming on the reputation he had acquired in the precincts of Finsbury, had staked a cool thousand on the issue, which the noble destroyer of doves very shortly "brought down" in bills at six months.

"Very well," said Sir Peter, when he was made acquainted with his son's exploit: "I had fixed upon just that sum to finish his education at Oxford: I perceive that it is already finished. Here, Lady Pimento, is a cheque for the *trifle*, as you are pleased to call it: if I had many such sons, such trifles would soon make me a broken merchant." A lucky speculation the next day restored the worthy knight to his usual placid state; and he began philosophically to consider children as a sort of commercial venture, which might turn out fortunate, pay the outfit, and reward the under-writers for the risk—or the reverse—just as "the Fates and Sister's three, and such like destinies," decreed.

It was at this epoch that Lady Pimento was struck with the discovery that it was high time the interesting and accomplished Amarantha should be brought out. Her father listened, in his usual serene way, to the suggestions of her lady mother; and, as he dared not demur, the thing was set about with becoming spirit; and routs, balls, and, to complete all, a morning concert made Portland Place one universal chaos of carriages, company, and confusion. The young lady was, indeed, brought out to some purpose: for, at the close of the morning concert, she was discovered to be missing, and no one knew how; but a polite note left on her dressing-table, informed her expectant parents that she had gone the way of all runaway young ladies—*via* Gretna Green, the companion of her flight being the Signor Soprano who had conferrèd on the concert the honour of his voice. Sir Peter stared, and looked puzzled, as well he might, and Lady P., for once seemed baffled and confounded.

"This is one of the consequences of teaching a merchant's daughter the trills and tricks of an Opera singer!" said Sir Peter, with a groan:—"Lady Pimento, I hope you are satisfied with her choice, and gratified by this palpable result of your precepts?" Lady P. did not look as if she was; but there was no knowing, for Signor Soprano was one of Lady Pimento's "dear creatures."

"Surely every thing that could tend to deprive a father of pride and comfort of his children has happened to me!" sighed the merchant, as he stepped out of doors on his way to the city; but he had reckoned without his ledger, as will be seen. However, to throw a little sunshine over that hour of unhappiness to the father, the merchant received news of the safe arrival of "the good ship Amarantha," with a fine cargo, "all well."

"Ah!" sighed Sir Peter, "the winds and waves are more obedient to my wishes than my children!" With a lighter heart he transacted the business of the day, and returned home at five. A mob was about the door; a cabriolet broken, and a beautiful bay, bleeding at the knees, told partly what had happened. He rush-

ed in: Lady P. met him at the stair-foot—"Oh, Sir Peter! Sir Peter!" she exclaimed, and fainted.

"What new horror have I now to endure?" demanded the anxious father, as his usual healthy colour forsook his face. It was explained to him, as tenderly as possible, that whilst Mr. Alfred was "airing" Mademoiselle Pirouette, the Opera dancer—with whom, it then came out, he had "an affair of the heart"—the bay, being high-bred, had taken fright at the wooden legs of a Chelsea pensioner near Kensington Gardens, and plunging into the surrounding "Ha-ha!" had broken its knees, the cabriolet, Mr. Alfred's head, and Mademoiselle Pirouette's ankle. Here Lady P. recovered; and after listening, with more patience than usual, to the lecture which her worthy husband delivered on the fashionable follies which he could foresee were destined to ruin him and his children, Lady P. commenced a reply equally eloquent, in vindication of her "dear Alfred." His errors were the errors of a young man of fashion—indications of the *esprit de corps*—signs of a noble ambition to be one of the *haut ton*. "And pray, Sir Peter," inquired the lady, to clinch the matter, "were you never guilty of any fashionable follies, when you were a young man?" "None, madam," replied the husband, "save going once in the season, to Vauxhall, and twice or thrice to the theatres: these were follies sufficient to season a year. But now—"

Lady P. cut short the comparison by a second query; "And were you never guilty of a worse folly?" "Yes, madam," replied the husband. "And pray what might that be?" further inquired the lady. "I married you, madam!" answered Sir Peter. And here Lady P. who had become a Lady-patroness of *nerves*, fainted again, and was carried by her women to her bed-chamber. Sir Peter then took the road to his son's dressing-room.

On entering, he found the valet bathing the head of his heir-apparent with Eau-de-Cologne; and, truly, when the father looked in his face he might well seem, as he was, puzzled, and somewhat doubtful whether the good Samaritans who had brought him home had not brought some other unhappy father's "dear Alfred," for he could not recognize a single feature of his face.

"Good God!" groaned the afflicted father, "that young men should thus wantonly risk limb and life in the pursuit of fashion!" He then gave a multiplicity of tender directions that "he should be well looked to;" and, wiping the moisture of anxiety from his forehead, stepped softly out of the room, to visit his least-patient, my lady. He knocked gently at the door, and then entered; but what was his surprise to find "the" Pirouette in his lady's bed, and Lady P. on an ottoman, not quite recovered from the shock of her nerves, yet sufficiently so to command Sir Peter to leave the chamber "for a brute as he was;" which he, as a husband should, did; and in a minute more, the house.

He was met at the door by the stable keeper of whom the bay had been hired, who very doggedly desired to know what was to be done with the mare, for she was "ruined beyond condemnation?" "Shoot her at once out of her misery," said Sir Peter; "and, if you have a second bullet disengaged, do me the same favour, and put down another hundred to your bill!" "Perhaps, Sir Peter, you will oblige me with your cheque for one hundred now for the bay!" Sir Peter hesitated a moment; "I'll first see the damage done, if you please Mr.—Mr.—good morning sir!"—and he bowed the trickster from the door, and made his way to the city.

"I am an unhappy father!" sighed the worthy merchant, as he entered his counting-house. "How is the market, Transit? how goes sugars?" "Up, Sir Peter, up—brisk—the demand is immense!" answered Mr. Transit. "Come, this is well!" and he was beginning to rub his hands, to express the satisfaction of success; but thoughts of home recurred, and he dropped them pensively by his sides. The merchant made a good morning's work, and returned in a more pleasant mood than usual to Portland Place. The lion-headed monster of his door was by that time comfortably wrapped up in white kid; the blinds were down from top to bottom of his house; and the splendid carriages of three fashionable surgeons were before the door.

"What now?" exclaimed Sir Peter, as he knocked softly, and then rang loudly at the area bell. "What has happened now?" he inquired anxiously, as the door opened. "Mademoiselle is in a fever, and the surgeons are in consultation about her ankle."

Sir Peter had almost vented his impatience in an English way, by bestowing a few epithets of national prejudice on foreigners generally; but he restrained the Englishman, and ordering a fowl to be served up in the library, entered that abode of silence, glad to escape from his own thoughts to those of others.