

A PRINCE AMONG BEGGARS.

I have already remarked that, with very few exceptions, all the London beggars live up to their means; and that what they earn, or rather swindle out of a benevolent and confiding public, is spent in eating and drinking. The luxuries in this way, which some of our street mendicants can often boast of, would appear incredible to those who are unacquainted with the subject. But gin is the great thing with most of them. I knew one, and only one, who spent a considerable portion of his professional proceeds in the article of dress. This man, who used to be seen daily in the neighbourhood of Holborn, decrepit in appearance, and with the most ragged wardrobe that was ever fastened about the human body, regularly gave up his avocation at six in the evening, and in about an hour afterwards, was to be seen in the parlour of a public-house in Gray's Inn Lane, where he remained till eleven at night, smoking his pipe, and drinking his brandy and water, and dressed in a suit of clothes, with his legs encased in top-boots, which no gentleman would be ashamed to wear. The gentleman to whom I am indebted for this interesting fact, tells me that he has missed this mendicant for some time, and has not been able to learn what has become of him. Very few of the fraternity, however, waste much of their gleanings in apparel: the belly is the great thing with the vast majority of them; they are great gourmands. Not more partial is an alderman to his turtle soup, than are these gentry to the good things of this life. There are several of them who 'spit' their goose or duck at least three times a week. There are also numbers who hold regular convivial meetings, at which some remarkable gastronomic feats are performed. On some special occasions they regularly elect their chairman, and have their series of toasts, their speeches and songs, as on other great public occasions. It is known to several persons that George IV., when Prince of Wales, went, on one occasion, with his friend, Major Hanger, to witness the scenes which take place at these guzzling exhibitions of the mendicants. Tutors as the young prince was by Sheridan and others of his boon companions in all sorts of frolics, he enjoyed the scene for some time. At last, however, a circumstance occurred which somewhat disconcerted him. The beggar who presided on the occasion as chairman, after a temporary pause in the merriment of the evening, rose, and pointing to the prince, said, 'With the permission of the company, I call on that ere gemman with a clean shirt on for a song.' A round of applause from the rest of the 'jolly beggars' showed how eagerly they responded to the appeal thus made to His Royal Highness. He winked significantly at Major Hanger, and then stammered out the expression of a hope, that as he was no singer, the company would excuse him.

'Not a bit of it,' said the chairman.

'Ve'll have no denial, young man,' said another of the jovial crew.

'Perhaps, gentlemen, you'll allow the gentleman to sing by proxy,' interposed Major Hanger.

'Proxy!' said several voices at once, 'vat's proxy?'

'O, another person singing for him,' answered the major.

'O, certainly, if he can find one,' said the chairman, looking round for the concurrence of the company in his sentiment.

'O, there can be no objections to that,' observed a dozen voices at once.

'Come, then, H—, you must do it yourself,' said the prince, addressing himself to the major. The latter promptly responded to the appeal, and sung amidst great applause, a well-known ballad—well-known, I mean, among the fraternity themselves—called 'The Beggar's Wedding.'

'Gen'l'men,' said the proprietor of a little unwashed and unshaved face, and a nose of remarkable flatness, who sat opposite the chairman, 'gen'l'men, let us drink the health and song of the gen'l'man vot's just sung.'

'Gen'l'men,' shouted the chairman, drawing his own glass towards himself; 'gen'l'men, fill your glasses.'

Every glass was full to the brim in a moment.

'The gen'l'man's health and song,' said the chairman, in stentorian accents.

'The gen'l'man's health and song,' shouted a host of voices, and in an instant every glass was emptied of its contents, except that of the prince.

'I say, young man, vy don't you drink to your friend?' said a round-faced mendicant, who sat opposite his Royal Highness, his eyes rolling in a fine frenzy through the inspiring influence of the liquid he had so copiously quaffed.

'O, I beg your pardon, sir,' answered the prince, who had been for the moment lost in surprise at the ecstasies of uproarious merriment he witnessed every where around him; 'O, I beg your pardon, sir, for the omission,—it was quite accidental, I assure you. This was addressed to the personage who had challenged him for not drinking to the major.'

'Vell, vy don't you do it now?' inquired the other, who was a very consequential personage in his own estimation.

The prince filled up his glass, and having drunk off the contents to the health and song of Major Hanger, held it out in his hand in an inverted position.

'Bravo! you're a trump! Go it, clean shirt!' shouted a dozen voices.

'Three cheers for the gentleman who has favoured us with so excellent a song!' exclaimed the prince, beginning to feel himself more at home. As he spoke he rose, and waved his hand with his empty glass in the air, as if to lead the plaudits of the others. All present were on their legs in an instant, and deafening and universal were the cheers with which the Major was greeted. The scene was kept up with great spirit and *eclat*, until at least one half of the 'jolly beggars' had drunk themselves asleep, and lay like so many masses of inert clay on the floor, in an horizontal position. The prince often afterwards spoke of this adventure. He never mentioned it in the hearing of Sheridan, without the latter feeling the deepest regret that he was not an actor in so rich a scene of low life.—*Sketches in London.*

PICKWICK PAPERS.—We must indulge in one more parting glance at these matchless effusions of wit and humour, for the sake of bringing forward, in a new character, one of the quietest, but by no means least efficient, of the personages who figure in the Pickwickian records:—

THE FAT BOY'S COURTSHIP.

With these words the fat boy led the way down stairs, his pretty companion captivating all the waiters and angering all the chambermaids as she followed him into the eating-room.

There was the meat pie of which the youth had spoken so feelingly; and there were, moreover, a steak and a dish of potatoes, and a pot of porter.

'Sit down,' said the fat boy. 'Oh, my eye,' how prime! I am so hungry.

Having apostrophised his eye in a species of rapture five or six times, the youth took the head of the little table, and Mary set herself at the bottom.

'Will you have some of this?' said the fat boy, plunging into the pie up to the very ferules of the knife and fork.

'A little, if you please,' replied Mary.

The fat boy assisted Mary to a little, and himself to a great deal, and was just going to begin eating, when he suddenly laid down his knife and fork, leant forward in his chair, and letting his hands, with the knife and fork in them, fall on his knees, said, very slowly,

'I say, how nice you do look!'

This was said in an admiring manner, and was, so far, gratifying; but still there was enough of the cannibal in the young gentleman's eyes to render the compliment a doubtful one.

'Dear me, Joseph,' said Mary, affecting a blush, 'what do you mean?'

The fat boy, gradually recovering his former position, replied with a heavy sigh, and remaining thoughtful for a few moments, drank a long draught of the porter. Having achieved this feat, he sighed again, and applied himself assiduously to the pie.

'What a nice young lady Miss Emily is!' said Mary, after a long silence.

The fat boy had by this time finished the pie. He fixed his eyes on Mary, and replied—

'I knows a nicerer.'

'Indeed!' said Mary.

'Yes, indeed!' replied the fat boy, with unwonted vivacity.

'What's her name?' inquired Mary.

'What's your's?'

'Mary.'

'So's her's,' said the fat boy. 'You're her.' The boy grinned to add point to the compliment, and put his eyes into something between a squint and a cast, which there is reason to believe he intended for an ogle.

'You mustn't talk to me in that way,' said Mary; 'you don't mean it.'

'Don't I, though?' replied the fat boy; 'I say—'

'Well.'

'Are you going to come here regular?'

'No,' rejoined Mary, shaking her head, 'I'm going away again to-night. Why?'

'Oh!' said the fat boy, in a tone of strong feeling; 'how we should have enjoyed ourselves at meals if you had been!'

'I might come here sometimes, perhaps, to see you,' said Mary plaiting the table cloth in assumed coyness, 'if you would do me a favour.'

The fat boy looked from the pie-dish to the steak, as if he thought a favour must be in a manner connected with something to eat; and then took out one of the half-crowns and glanced at it nervously.

'Don't you understand me?' said Mary, looking slyly in his fat face.

Again he looked at the half-crown, and said faintly, 'No.'

'The ladies want you not to say anything to the old gentleman about the young gentleman having been up stairs; and I want you too.'

'Is that all?' said the fat boy, evidently very much relieved as he pocketed the half-crown again. 'Of course I ain't a going to.'

'You see,' said Mary, 'Mr. Snodgrass is very fond of Miss Emily, and Miss Emily's very fond of him, and if you were to

tell about it, the old gentleman would carry you all away, mile into the country, where you'd see nobody.'

'No, no, I wo'nt tell,' said the fat boy, stoutly.

'That's a dear,' said Mary. 'Now it's time I went up stairs and got my lady ready for dinner.'

'Don't go yet,' urged the fat boy.

'I must,' replied Mary. 'Good bye, for the present.'

The fat boy, with elephantine playfulness, stretched out his arms to ravish a kiss; but as it required no great agility to elude him, his fair enslaver had vanished before he closed them again upon which the apathetic youth ate a pound or so of steak with sentimental countenance, and fell fast asleep.

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