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OLIVER TWIST.

Boz is a truly national author—English to the backbone. His countrymen, high and low, are all influenced by a lurking *prestige* in favour of a wild, adventurous, Robin Hood life: we imbibe it in the ballads of our youth; it is the remnant of the Anglo-Saxon resistance against a Norman invader.

Life in London as revealed in the pages of Boz, opens a new world to thousands bred and born in the same city, whose palaces overshadow their cellars—for the one half of mankind lives without knowing how the other half dies: in fact, the regions about Saffron Hill are less known to our great world than the Oxford Tracts; the inhabitants are still less; they are as human, at least to all appearance as are the Esquimaux or the Russians, and probably (though the Zoological Society will not vouch for it) endowed with souls; but, whether souled or not souled, they are too far beneath the higher classes to endanger any loss of caste or contamination in the inquiry. Secure in their own position, these really enjoy Boz; they have none of the vulgarity of the *centre gauche*, who cut human nature unless perfectly *comme il faut*, who would not demean themselves with Boz or his 'horribly low, book, who set their affection on higher objects—while their superiors, in the aping of whom they become ridiculous, have naturally the opposite tendency to look downwards from their meridian.

Boz fills the print-shops—Boz furnishes subjects to playwrights and farce writers; he is the play himself, now that brutes feed where Garrick trod; he brings home to us tragedy, comedy, and farce; the mountain comes to Mahomet, to us in our easy chairs, by our fires, and wives' sides, unpoisoned by the gas and galleries, unheadached by the music and bill of the play. Boz, like Byron, has his imitators: since the increasing demand for the Nickleby article, Boz, not being protected by patent like Mackintosh, has been pirated; cuckoos lay their eggs in his nest; countless are the Factory-Boys which Mrs. Trollope has tamed loose; even history becomes Pickwickian; Gurwood, cut like Romeo into small shooting stars, despatches majors and minors, *Scott* and lot, all aiming at the life of England's Duke, which we hope (notwithstanding he has escaped a hundred victories) is still insured. These biographers run shilling handicaps, the more subscribers the better—*nos numeri sumus*. Whatever may be the merit of these imitations, for which we are not now looking, the strength of Boz consists in his originality, in his observation of character, his humour—on which he never dwells. He leaves a good thing alone, like Curacoa, and does not dilute it; wit, which is not taught in Gower Street, drops out of his mouth as naturally as pearls and diamonds in the fairy tale; the vein is rich, racy, sparkling, and goodnatured—never savage, sarcastic, malevolent, nor misanthropic; always well placed and directed against the odious, against purse-pride insolence, and the abuse of brief authority. Boz never ridicules the poor, the humble, the ill-used; he spares to real sorrow 'the bitterest insult of a scornful jest'; his sympathies are on the right side and carry his readers with him. Though dealing with the dregs of society, he is never indelicate, indecent, nor irreligious; he never approves nor countenances the gross, the immoral, or offensive: he but holds these vices up in a pillory, as a warning of disgrace of criminal excess. Boz, like the bee, buzzes amid honey without clogging his wings; he handles pitch charmingly; the tips of the thumb and fore-finger of the cigaresque señoras of Paraguay are infinitely more discoloured. He tells a tale of real crushing misery in plain, and therefore most effective, language; he never *then* indulges in false sentimentality, or mawkish, far-fetched verbiage. Fagin, Sikes, and the dog especially, are always in their proper and natural places, always speaking, barking, and acting exactly as they would have done, and, as far as we are able to judge, with every appearance of truth. Boz sketches localities, particularly in London, with marvellous effect; he concentrates with the power of a camera lucida. Born with an organic bump for distinct observation of men and things, he sees with the eye, and writes with the pen of an artist—we mean with artistical skill, and not as artists write. He translates nature and life. The identical landscape or occurrence, when reduced on one sheet, will interest and astonish those who had before seen with eyes, that saw not, and heard with ears that heard not, on whom previously the general incident had produced no definite effect. Boz sets before us in a strong light the water standing in the orphan's eye, the condemned prisoner, the iron entering into his soul. This individuality arrests, for our feelings for human suffering in the aggregate are vague, erratic, and undefined. He collects them into one burning focus; a practical oppression is perfectly under-

stood by the mass, even by the irrational 'masses,' however they may be ignorant of the real causes and appropriate remedies. A general wrong, a poll-tax, will be borne without resistance, a particular outrage shown to the daughter of Wat Tyler came home to the clenched fists of a million fathers; for private feelings pave the way to public outbreaks. Death, again, as an abstract idea, is a thing for declamation. Boz gives the newly-dug grave, the rope grating when withdrawn from under the lowered coffin, and the hollow sound from the shovelful of earth thrown in. The nearer we approach to the corpse, the more appalling is death. The circumstantiality of the murder of Nancy is more harrowing than the bulletin of 50,000 men killed at Borodino. Bloodshed in midday comes home to our peaceful threshold, it shocks the order of things; it occurs amid life. Wholesale carnage, battle's own daughter, is what we expect, and is gilded with glory and victory, not visited by shame and punishment.

Boz fails whenever he attempts to write for effect; his descriptions of rural felicity and country scenery, of which he clearly knows much less than of London, where he is quite at home and wide awake, are, except when comical, over-laboured and out of nature. His 'gentle and genteel folks' are unendurable; they are devoid of the grace, repose, and ease of good society; a something between Cheltenham and New York. They and their extreme propriety of ill-bred good-breeding are (at least we hope so) altogether the misconceptions of our author's uninitiated imagination, mystified by the inanities of the kid-glove Novelists. Boz is, nevertheless, never vulgar when treating on subjects which are avoidably vulgar. He deals truly with human nature, which never can degrade; he takes up everything, good, bad, or indifferent, which he works up into a rich alluvial deposit. He is natural, and that never can be ridiculous. He is never guilty of the two common extremes of second-rate authors—the one a pretension of intimate acquaintance with the inner life of Grosvenor Square—the other an affected ignorance of the doings, and a sneering at the bad diners, of Bloomsbury—he leaves that for people to whom such dinners would be an unusual feast.

Boz is regius professor of slang, that expression of the mother-wit, the low humour of the lower classes, their Sanscrit, their hitherto unknown tongue, which, in the present phasis of society and politics, seems like to become the idiom of England. Where drabs, house-breakers, and tavern-spouting patriots play the first fiddle, they can only speak the language which expresses their ideas and habits. In order fully to enjoy their force, we must know the conventional value of these symbols of ideas, although we do not understand the lingo like Boz, who has it at his fingers' ends. We are amused with the comicality, in spite of our repugnance that the decent veil over human guilt and infirmities should be withdrawn; we grieve that the deformity of nakedness should not only be exhibited to the rising generation, but rendered agreeable by the undeniable drollery; a coarse transcript would not be tolerated. This is the great objection which we feel towards Oliver Twist. It deals with the outcasts of humanity, who do their dirty work in work, pot, and watch houses, to finish on the Newgate drop.

The happy ignorance of innocence is disregarded. Our youth should not even suspect the possibility of such hidden depths of guilt, for their tender memories are wax to receive and marble to retain. These infamies feed the innate evil principle, which luxuriates in the supernatural and horrid, the dread and delight of our childhood, which is never shaken off, for no man entirely outlives the nursery. We object to the familiarising our ingenuous youth with 'slang'; it is based in travesty of better things. Noble and generous ideas, when expressed in low and mean terms, become ludicrous from the contrast and incongruity. But the base vehicle conveys too frequently opinions and sentiments which could thus alone gain admission. The jests and jeers of the 'slangers' leave a sting behind them. They corrupt pure taste and pervert morality, for vice loses shame when treated as a fool-born joke, and those who are not ashamed to tell of a thing will not be long ashamed to put it into practice. The Dodgers and Sikes break into our Johnsons, rob the queen's lawful current English; they, at least, are unfettered by grammar. Boz is no reader of Aristotle—

'Laws his Pindaric parents minded not,
For Boz was tragi-comically got.'

His fable or plot, is devoid of art. This, a fault in comedy, is pardonable in tragedy—where persons, not events, excite. We foresee the thunder-cloud over *Oedipus* and the Master of Ravenswood without decrease of interest, which is not diminished

even on reperusal, by our perfect knowledge of the catastrophe; but Boz must remember that he is not in the high tragedy line, which deals more in the expression of elevated persons and thoughts, in an elevated manner, than in the mere contrast of situations and events; and make a better story next time. He should also avoid, in future, all attempts at pure pathos—on which he never ventures without reminding us of Sterne, and of his own immense inferiority to that master. Let him stick to his native vein of the *serio-comic*, and blend humour with pathos. He shines in this: his sun sets off his horrors as effectually as a Frenchman's gravity in a quadrille does his levity in an *emete*, or a massacre.

He appears to propose to himself in all his works some definite abuse to be assailed. Thus *Pickwick*, the investigator of 'title-bats,' sallaying forth with his disciples on knight-erratic discoveries, conveys a good-humoured satire on the meetings of those peripatetic philosophers, who star, sectionise, and eat turtle in the commercial towns, making fools of themselves, throwing a ridicule over science, and unsettling country gentlemen from their legitimate studies of poor, poachers, and turnpikes. *Buzfuz* and *tomata-sauce* are a fair exposition of the brow-beating system of our courts of justice; the verdict does honour to trial by jury, *Nickleby* is aimed, primarily, at those cheap seminaries where starvation is taught gratis, and which we fear were too common throughout England; and we rejoice to hear that the exposure has already put down many infant bastilles. We fear, however, that no *Nickleby* will reform the weak, vacillating *Verisophts*, or the griping, spider-like *pettifoggers*; for where there is carrion there will be kites. The poor-creature tribe of dandies (of which Boz has a most imperfect and conventional idea) would otherwise have been created in vain. The destiny of rivers, according to *Brindley*, was to feed navigable canals; that of the harmless exquisites is to eat *Crocky's entrees*, and to be eaten up by black-legs, Opera-dancers, their own conceit, their valets, and usurious attorneys.

Oliver Twist, again, is directed against the poor-law and workhouse system, and in our opinion with much unfairness. The abuses which he ridicules are not only exaggerated, but in nineteen cases out of twenty do not at all exist. Boz so rarely mixes up politics, or panders to vulgar prejudices about serious things, that we regret to see him joining in an outcry which is partly factious, partly sentimental, partly interested. The besetting sin of 'white-waistcoated' guardians is profusion, not parsimony; and this always must be the case where persons have to be charitable out of funds to which individually they are small contributors.

The whole tale rivals in improbabilities those stories in which the hero at his birth is cursed by a wicked fairy and protected by a good one; but *Oliver* himself, to whom all these improbabilities happen, is the most improbable of all. He is represented to be a pattern of modern excellence, guileless himself, and measuring others by his own innocence; delicate and high-minded, affectionate, noble, brave, generous, with the manners of a son of a most distinguished gentleman, not only uncorrupted but incorruptible: less absurd would it be to expect to gather grapes on thorns, to find pearls in dunghills, violets in *Drury Lane*, or make silk purses of sows' ears. Boz, in his accurate representation of *Noah Claypole*, shows that he knows how much easier the evil principle is developed than the good. He draws the certain effects of certain causes. Workhouse boys are not born with original virtue; nor was any one except *Daniel* exposed to wild beasts without being eaten up. We are not afraid that the rational portion of Boz's readers may be misled by examples which they know never did and never can exist in reality, and which they presume were invented in order to exaggerate the pathos, and throw by contrast an additional horror on vice: yet the numerical majority of the young, and of the lower orders—(for whom books in shilling Numbers have the appearance of being mainly designed)—judge from feelings, and are fascinated by the brilliant fallacies which reach the head through the heart.

One word of farewell to our pleasant Boz. We warn him like the weird sisters—beware of the worst cockneyism—that of *May-fair*: eschew mawkish, unmanly sentimentalism: beware of pseudo-Byrons, of men without cravats or principles, whose rude, false, sensual, ungenerous hearts are poorly concealed beneath golden chains and speckled waistcoats, men more truly vulgar than any *Bates* or *Dodger*. If Boz values his fair fame more than *Mr. Bentley's* ducats—if he aspires to something better than being made a show of for a season or two—let him alike shun *Mr. Sikes* and his gin-bottle, *Miss Nancy* and my *Lady Matilda's* eye.