

fold, like unsullied snow-flakes, the gathered purity in my hand as I lift it to my heated brow. Lissa knows this, and, on extra occasions, picks from my cherished hoard that I keep sacred from common use, having bought them in Paris, in the year eighteen hundred and—no matter when.

Imagine my ride to the hall, my escort of able-bodied men, all vying to be at the head; my entrance at the side door; the grand outlook upon a sea of heads—bald, white, red, brown, yellow; my solid, penetrating expression as I seated myself, anathematizing my trembling knees furiously, inside; the preliminary ceremonies; the reference to "our eloquent friend who is now about to address you." Imagine all this, I say; then the wild uproar of clapping and stamping, commenced by six little Milesians on the front bench, and kept up till my introductory remarks nearly choked me for very eagerness to get out and be done with it.

I commenced—I continued. When they said "Louder," I smote the very air with ear-piercing shouts. The gas, and the crowd, and my own eloquence, warmed me up; my temples grew moist; I felt uncomfortable; I felt also for my handkerchief, and took it out in its primitive folds as it came from the good old black fingers of Tiddy.

It was near the climax of a sublime figure of speech. I had used up several ancient classics, and was nearing my grandest peroration, when I heard somebody snicker. The word is not elegant, but there is no other in all the range of the English language that so accurately describes the contortion of which the sound is born.

Quietly, gracefully, like a well-bred man, I had opened my handkerchief softly, unostentatiously, and smiled my sweetest smiles, and said my brightest say as I unfolded it.

It seemed to me that the sound I have before mentioned broadened and deepened, like a wave that spreads as it rolls. Now here, now there—What I said surely did not call for laughter: why were all eyes turned where I turned mine? Presently—Heavens and earth!

Hanging down nearly to my feet, whiter even than the "beautiful snow" at which so many editors have shivered, was—

A British nightcap!

Have you ever seen one? No? Then you are not called upon to laugh. Mine was as large as a good-sized mail-bag, gathered at one end into a voluminous tassel, which, as I had daintily manoeuvred, came into sight in the slowest and most deliberate fashion, mutely appealing to the ludicrous side of the most stolid nature in the whole crowded house.

It was a relic of old London, of the Strand, of the days of Hogarth, Johnson, and other patented celebrities, and redolent of the odours of "mine inn," the chop-house and coffee-rooms, to me; but to my audience! that was quite another matter.

For a moment I felt like one in the grasp of enormous pinchers. A buzzing, prickling sensation, like the flight of a thousand fire-flies, thrilling along my veins; anon I was one icicle.

"O Lissa!" I groaned, with my soul between my teeth, "what *will* you do next?"

I believe I smiled and smiled, and felt a villain, as I gathered up, with sufficient muscular energy to have crushed an iron bar, that dreadful evidence of my dear wife's thoughtful care of her absent lord, and put it out of sight. I know I looked an imbecile: I am sure I felt a fury, Metaphors and similes and paradoxes got mixed together: everything resolved itself into an immense English night-cap, which seemed to hang threateningly from the grand chandelier, from the ceiling, everywhere.

Some way I got through—to this hour I know not how. I was mixed generally for a day or two afterwards, and didn't find myself thoroughly and rationally for a longer period.

And all the comfort I received from that wife of mine, when I told her, was a hysterical laugh, and—

"Oh, I wish I *could* have seen it! It must have been too funny for anything.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Madam," said our new compositor, with his blandest smile, as Lissa entered the parlour, where Tiddy had seated a stranger, "I have I presume the honour of addressing Mrs. Harman."

My wife, always a little too ready to meet trouble half way, turned pale at this speech. "I am Mrs. Harman," she said, somewhat unsteadily. "I hope you have not heard any—any bad news from"—for she saw a letter in his hand.

"I have a letter from Mr. Harman; and, as I am new to the office, it has taken me the greater part of the day to translate it, as you must be aware."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed my wife, her spirits rising, as she cut short his insinuating but polite bow and smooth smile. "Mr. Harman does write an execratable hand. I cannot but just make it out sometimes."

"But just! My dear madam, I think it would take five Oriental dictionaries, putting it in the mildest way, and the ghost of old Noah Webster, to translate some portions of this letter into good English. For myself, I

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