

BLACKWOOD'S—

UNQUESTIONABLY the most splendid periodical of the day—is this month more than usually rich in its intellectual treasures: we shall extract a few morsels from a *jeu d'esprit*, called

My After-Dinner Adventures with Peter Schlemihl.

"Feeling myself," says the narrator, "a little out of sorts, with flying pains about my ankles and toes, I retired for relief to Seacombe, on the banks of the Mersey, opposite to Liverpool. After dinner, one day, whilst cogitating on the delicious savour of mock-turtle soup, and whether it was known to the ancients, when a tall, gentlemanly-looking man, entered his room, and, familiarly helping himself to a glass of wine, exclaimed "Do you know me?—I am Peter Schlemihl;—I am come to take a walk with you. Do you know Liverpool?" "No," said I, bolting out a lie at once. "I thought so, and for that reason I have called upon you to go there: as, I believe, you like turtle, there are several houses in Liverpool where turtle is dressed to perfection that would raise a chuckle in the gullet of an expiring alderman. So, come along." I felt no power to resist, but almost instantly found myself on board the steam-packet, sailing on my way to Liverpool, in company with Peter Schlemihl.

In a few seconds we were across the river and landed on the parade; but, in ascending the steps, some villain, with an iron heel to his boot, gave my toes such a squeeze, that I almost screamed with agony. Peter saw my distress, and putting an arm through one of mine, "Never mind," said he, "I'll provide you with consolation;" and almost before I had time to ask whither we were going, I found myself seated with him in a room in the Mersey Hotel.

"I have dined," said I, as I almost mechanically took a spoonful; but that spoonful sufficed to drive away all remembrance of my pain, and all recollection of my dinner. It was delectable; and we ladled away with the gusto of men tasting turtle for the last time.

"How do you like it?" said Peter, when I had finished.

"It is admirable," I replied; "who could help liking it?"

"Well," said he, "if you are satisfied, put the spoon in your pocket, and let us march."

"The spoon in my pocket!" I answered; "do you wish me to be taken up as a thief?"

"Quite a matter of taste," said Peter Schlemihl; "suppose you had swallowed it by accident—and you opened a mouth wide enough to have admitted a soup-ladle, putting a simple spoon out of the question—suppose you had swallowed it by accident, could you have been successfully accused of theft? And where is the difference to Mr. Horne, the landlord, betwixt your putting the spoon in your stomach by accident, and putting it in your pocket by design? In either case, I take it, the loss to him would be pretty much the same; so the difference, you see, is but in words; but, come along."

So saying, he again put my hat on my head, giving it a thump, and putting my gloves in my hand, I was presently walking in his company, at a quick rate, towards the Exchange, without having any clear idea of the way in which we left the turtle-room in the Mersey Hotel.

"Is it not a handsome pile of building?" said Peter Schlemihl, after he had walked me round the Town Hall, and pointed out its beauties—its portico—its frieze—its dome—and, after he had led me round the area of the Exchange buildings, and pointed out each and every part worth notice.

"Is it not a handsome pile of building?" said he.

"It is, undoubtedly, very handsome," I replied, "and does great credit to the place; but, as a piece of architecture, it is by no means perfect; and"

"For mercy's sake," said Peter, "don't turn critical! if you do, I will desert you. I have known many critics in my time, but I never knew but one sensible man of the craft: and he lived to regret his taste as a misfortune. No, no! rules are very necessary in every art and every science; but never do you imbibe the notion, that nothing can be pleasing or beautiful that is not strictly according to rule. Now, there is a monument to Nelson—the glorious Nelson—before you; but, handsome as it is, and suitable as it is to a naval hero, in an important sea-port town, and standing on the high mart of foreign commerce, yet I will not allow you to look at it, for it is not strictly correct according to the code critical. By the by, did you ever see that funny affair that the Birmingham gentlemen put up in memory of the same great man? Lying so far inland, they did not perfectly understand what a sailor was like, but they made a little gentleman in black, and having heard of the green sea, they set him up in business in their market-place as a green grocer, being the nearest approach to the green sea that their imagination could suggest—what the devil business had Nelson in a market-place?—they might as well have made him a button-maker!—but, come along to the Zoological Gardens;" and again taking my arm, and before I was aware whither we were going, Peter and I were *telc-a-tcle* with a lion.

"He is a noble animal!" said I.

"He's up to snuff," said Peter.

He then insinuated his box of Lundy Foot, without the lid,

cautiously into the lion's cage, gently obtruding it upon the lion's notice with the end of his stick.

The lion, on seeing it, went leisurely to it, and took a hearty snuff, as if he had been a snuff-taker from his infancy; the cage echoed with a tremendous sneeze, and presently with another, and a third; and he then shook his head, and his eyes watered, and he looked very like an old gentleman maudlin drunk. Again he sneezed, and being impatient at the pungency and inconvenience, he gave vent to his anger in a fearful roar, which attracted the attention of the keepers and visitors, and induced them to come towards us.

Peter Schlemihl observed their movement, and, again taking me by the arm, we were once more on the parade, and strolling up Bold Street, on our way, as Peter said, to St. James's Cemetery!

"Rather a solemn place for a lounge?" said I.

"That's all you know of the matter!" replied Peter; "really, you men that live in the country and eat vegetables have extraordinary notions! Why, some people consider it a very interesting and agreeable scene. By the by, I met a friend one day last summer, who excused himself for not taking a walk, by saying that his brother-in-law was come to Liverpool in the last stage of consumption, and he was going to take him a ride by way of amusing him. 'And where are you going to take the poor gentleman?' I enquired. 'To the cemetery,' answered he, 'it is as agreeable a place as any I know.' I was amused at the idea of taking a dying man to the cemetery by way of amusing him, and was at the trouble to go there myself to see if the fact would be as stated; and sure enough my friend and his brother-in-law made their appearance, the latter more dead than alive. He, however, said he was much amused, and he seemed to take such a fancy to the place, that in a fortnight afterwards, he was provided with permanent lodgings there. So you see," added Peter, "every body is not exactly of your opinion."

We walked round, and, in the course of the lounge, met thirteen incipient Byrons, aged from fifteen to nineteen, each with a broad shirt-collar turned down, and open at the front, to show the throat, with a black bandana tied sailor-wise.

Four were smacking cigars—real lighted cigars—the puppies! five held between their teeth imitation cigars, coloured brown, and painted red at the end to appear like fire, and white to appear like ashes—the greater puppies! The remainder were innocent of cigar, either real or imitative.

They all looked melancholy, bilious, and saffron-coloured, and appeared to have been picking out their respective situations in the cemetery.

"This beautiful cemetery," said I, "is an admirable adaptation of the old stone quarry, and some of the inscriptions on the stones are very affecting."

"No doubt they are," replied Peter Schlemihl, "to such a spoon as you; but have you yet to learn that in a church-yard no person is allowed to have any other than a good character? Death connects the most contemptible animals that ever blood warmed into tender fathers—affectionate husbands—faithful wives—dutiful children, and such like. The church and the church-yard is the only place to acquire a good character graven in stone. Try your hand at giving some scoundrel his due in his epitaph—venture to write upon a gravestone that on such a day such a person died, well known to all his friends and acquaintances as the greatest rascal that his parish contained; excelling all men in his several vocations of swindler, perjurer, and thief. Try your hand at that, and see how many will step forward to prevent your telling the truth. If you persist in your experiment, you will very soon find yourself doing penance in a white sheet, my gentleman! for saying any thing but good of the dead."

Peter's morality appeared to evaporate with the last sentence; and slipping his arm in mine, he left the cemetery, and went the shortest way to the Custom-house.

Business was in its heyday, and the rooms were consequently crowded; and I was horrified almost to fainting when I heard Peter Schlemihl, very calmly and deliberately, and with great distinctness of voice, ask me to reach a great spring clock, which was suspended against a wall, and put it in his pocket!

I looked at him to see if I could discover whether he really was in earnest, but he repeated his request in a tone that seemed to say that he would be obeyed, and muttered something about a policeman, and I felt that I had no alternative but to comply. I got upon a desk and reached down the abominable clock, and to my surprise it slipped easily into his pocket, and to my greater surprise, no one in the room took notice of the transaction!

I hastened out of the place, determined to get away and return to Seacombe, when, turning my head, I found to my grief and amazement, that I was accompanied by Peter Schlemihl!

He gave me a knowing look; and as we trudged on, shoulder to shoulder, "This is a nice clock we've got," said he.

I was ready to drop with vexation, but it was of no use—it did not in the least disturb the equanimity of Peter Schlemihl.

"Stop!" said he seizing me by the shoulder—"it is worse than useless to waste our wind in this way. I am going to smoke a cigar—will you have one? it is a real good one."

I was grown desperate, and was glad of any thing for a change; so I took a cigar and began to smoke furiously.

In this mood we went on together, both smoking; but, in my confusion of mind, I was led by Peter Schlemihl past the proper place of embarkation for Seacombe, and as we were proceeding along Bath Street, he put the finish to my distress and rage, by sticking his lighted cigar into a cart-load of hemp that was being discharged at a ware-house.

Instantly the whole was in a blaze—the warehouse took fire—the fire-engines were called for—a crowd collected—a body of police appeared—search commenced for the incendiary—and, to escape from the consequences of this diabolical act of my companion, I made the best of my way to the river side, and jumped into the first thing I came to in the shape of a boat, trembling from head to foot, and seeing nothing but the gallows before me.

"Are you ready to start again?" said Peter.

"Start again! where?" I replied.

"On our walk," said Peter, "surely it is not over yet?"

"Not over yet?" I answered: "if ever any man catches me again walking with you, Peter Schlemihl, I'll give them leave to call me the wandering Jew!"

"Oh! that is your determination, is it?" said he; "very well, be it so, my fine fellow. In that case I will take my departure, leaving you this token of remembrance,"—saying which, he got up and jumped full five feet high, alighting with his two heavy heels immediately upon my toes, and then deliberately walked out of the room, impudently winking his eye at me as he went through the door-way.

The cruel agony of that jump made me roar out, and roll off my chair upon the ground from very pain; and my wife, awaking at the noise, raised me up, and enquired what was the matter.

"That Peter Schlemihl!" said I,——"that infernal Peter Schlemihl! he has lamed me for life!"

"Peter Schlemihl!" exclaimed my wife, "you are dreaming!"

I, however, knew better, and rang the bell, and enquired for Peter Schlemihl; but whether the waiter was in his confidence, or whether Peter Schlemihl had managed to make his entrance and his exit without being perceived, I do not know, but the waiter certainly denied all knowledge of Peter Schlemihl!

I then detailed the whole of my adventures to my wife, commencing with the first obtrusion of Peter Schlemihl into the room, and ending with his jumping upon my toes when he took his final departure.

Still she said it was but a dream!

I then rang the bell, and requested the attendance of Mr. Parry, and every man and woman servant in the house. I described Peter Schlemihl, and I begged of Mr. Parry that he would search about the premises for him, and desire that stout gentleman, Mr. Smith, to prevent his going away, by any of the packets. "You will be sure to find him," said I, "and he has got the Custom-house clock in his pocket." But stout Mr. Smith avers that he has not yet received three-pence from him, and to this hour he remains undiscovered, which is to me very remarkable.

I suffered such torment in my feet, that I soon afterwards went to bed, but not to sleep.

A surgeon (a medical gentleman, the cant phrases for one of those bundles of cruelty) was immediately called in, and, in looking at my toes, he significantly said, "It is the gout!"

Wishing to undeceive him, I gave him a minute narrative of all I had endured—told him the various stampings and squeezings to which I had been a martyr, and the savage jump with which the brute treated me when he took himself away!

"It is all a dream!" said my wife.

"It is dispepsia and night-mare," said the doctor, "and the result is the gout!"

"Whilst I contend, with all the confidence of truth, that my ramble with Peter Schlemihl was a real and *bona fide* ramble!

Which do you think is right?"

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