

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY.

The never-tiring and ever-fascinating Boz seems determined to convince the world the resources of his inventive genius are inexhaustible, by the late numbers of his "Nicholas Nickleby," which are full of the most amusing and exhilarating incidents: we here select two or three rich bits, told in the author's peculiar manner.

MRS. NICKLEBY'S SUITORS.

"Oh yes!" said Kate, "I remember. I was going to ask, mamma, before you were married, had you many suitors?"

"Suitors, my dear!" cried Mrs. Nickleby, with a smile of wonderful complacency. "First and last, Kate, I must have had a dozen at least."

"Mamma!" returned Kate, in a tone of remonstrance.

"I had indeed, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby; "not including your poor papa, or a young gentleman who used to go at that time to the same dancing-school, and who would send gold watches and bracelets to our house in gilt-edged paper, (which were always returned,) and who afterwards unfortunately went out to Botany Bay in a convict ship—a convict ship I mean—and escaped into a bush and killed sheep, (I don't know how they got there,) and was going to be hung, only he accidentally choked himself, and the government pardoned him. Then there was young Lukin," and Mrs. Nickleby, beginning with her left thumb, and checking off the names on her fingers—"Mogley—Tipslark—Cabby—Smifser—"

Having now reached the little finger, Mrs. Nickleby was carrying the account over to the other hand, when a loud "Heu!" which appeared to come from the very foundation of the garden wall, gave both herself and her daughter a violent start.

Declaration of love by the gentleman next door to Mrs. Nickleby.

As Kate rose from her seat in some alarm, and caught her mother's hand to run with her into the house, she felt herself rather retarded than assisted in her intention; and, following the direction of Mrs. Nickleby's eyes, was quite terrified by the apparition of an old black velvet cap, which, by slow degrees, as if its wearer were ascending a ladder or pair of stops, rose above the wall dividing their garden from that of the next cottage, (which, like their own, was a detached building,) and was gradually followed by a very large head, and an old face, in which were a pair of most extraordinary grey eyes, very wild, very wide open, and rolling in their sockets with a dull, languishing, and leering look, most ugly to behold.

"Mamma!" cried Kate, really terrified for the moment, "why do you stop, why do you lose an instant?—Mamma, pray come in!"

"What do you want, sir?" said Mrs. Nickleby, addressing the intruder with a sort of simpering displeasure. "How dare you look into this garden?"

"Queen of my soul," replied the stranger, folding his hands together, "this goblet sip."

"Nonsense, sir," said Mrs. Nickleby. "Kate, my love, pray be quiet."

"Won't you sip the goblet?" urged the stranger, with his head imploringly on one side, and his right hand on his breast. "Oh, do sip the goblet!"

"I shall not consent to do anything of the kind, sir," said Mrs. Nickleby, with a haughty air. "Pray, begone."

"Why is it," said the old gentleman, coming up a step higher, and leaning his elbows on the wall, with as much complacency as if he was looking out of window, "why is it that beauty is always obdurate, even when admiration is as honourable and respectful as mine?" Here he smiled, kissed his hand, and made several low bows. "Is it owing to the bees, who, when the honey season is over, and they are supposed to have been killed with brimstone, in reality fly to Barbary and lull the captive Moors to sleep with their drowsy songs? Or is it," he added, drooping his voice almost to a whisper, "in consequence of the statue at Charing Cross having been lately seen on the Stock Exchange at midnight, walk arm-in-arm with the Pump from Aldgate, in a riding habit?"

"Mamma," murmured Kate, "do you hear him?"

"Hush, my dear!" replied Mrs. Nickleby, in the same tone of voice, "he is very polite, and I think that was a quotation from the poets. Pray, don't worry me so—you'll pinch my arm black and blue. Go away, sir."

"Quite away?" said the gentleman, with a languishing look, "Oh! quite away?"

"Yes," returned Mrs. Nickleby, "certainly. You have no business here. This is private property, sir; you ought to know that."

"I do know," said the old gentleman, laying his finger on his nose with an air of familiarity most reprehensible, "that this is a sacred and enchanted spot, where the most divine charms"—here he kissed his hand and bowed again—"waft mellifluousness over the neighbours' gardens, and force the fruit and vegetables into premature existence. That fact I am acquainted with. But will you permit me, fairest creature, to ask you one question, in the absence of the planet Venus, who has gone on business to the

Horse Guards, and would otherwise—jealous of your superior charms—interpose between us?"

"If you will conduct yourself, sir, like the gentleman which I should imagine you to be from your language and—appearance, (quite the counterpart of your grand-papa, Kate my dear, in his best days,) and will put your question to me in plain words, I will answer it."

"If Mrs. Nickleby's excellent papa had borne, in his best days, a resemblance to the neighbour now looking over the wall, he must have been, to say the least, a very queer looking old gentleman in his prime. Perhaps Kate thought so, for she ventured to glance at his living portrait with some attention, as he took off his black velvet cap, and exhibiting a perfectly bald head, made a long series of bows each accompanied with a fresh kiss of the hand. After exhausting himself, to all appearance, with this fatiguing performance, he covered his head once more, pulled the cap very carefully over the tips of his ears, and resuming his former attitude, said,

"The question is—"

Here he broke off to look round in every direction, and satisfy himself beyond all doubt that there were no listeners near. Assured that there were not, he tapped his nose several times, accompanying the action with a canning look, as though congratulating himself on his caution; and stretching out his neck, said in a loud whisper,

"Are you a princess?"

"You are mocking me, sir," replied Mrs. Nickleby, making a feint of retreating towards the house.

"No, but are you?" said the old gentleman.

"You know I am not, sir," replied Mrs. Nickleby.

"Then are you any relation to the Archbishop of Canterbury?" inquired the old gentleman with great anxiety, "or to the Pope of Rome? or the Speaker of the House of Commons? Forgive me, if I am wrong, but I was told you were niece to the Commissioners of Paving, and daughter-in-law to the Lord Mayor and Court of Common Council, which would account for your relationship to all three."

"Whoever has spread such reports, sir," returned Mrs. Nickleby, with some warmth, "has taken great liberties with my name, and one which I am sure my son Nicholas, if he was aware of it, would not allow for an instant. The idea!" said Mrs. Nickleby, drawing herself up, "niece to the Commissioners of Paving!"

"Pray, mamma, come away!" whispered Kate.

"Pray, mamma! Nonsense, Kate," said Mrs. Nickleby, angrily, "but that's just the way. If they had said I was niece to a piping bullfinch, what would you care? But I have no sympathy"—whispered Mrs. Nickleby, "I don't expect it, that's one thing."

"Tears!" cried the old gentleman, with such an energetic jump, that he fell down two or three steps, and grated his chin against the wall. "Catch the crystal globules—catch 'em—bottle 'em up—cork 'em tight—put sealing wax on the top—seal 'em with a cupid—label 'em 'Best quality'—and stow 'em away in the fourteen binn, with a bar of iron on the top to keep the thunder off!"

Issuing these commands, as if there were a dozen attendants all actively engaged in their execution, he turned his velvet cap inside out, put it on with great dignity so as to obscure his right eye and three fourths of his nose, and sticking his arms a-kimbo, looked very fiercely at a sparrow hard by, till the bird flew away, when he put his cap in his pocket with an air of great satisfaction, and addressed himself with a respectful demeanour to Mrs. Nickleby.

"Beautiful madam," such were his words—"if I have made any mistake with regard to your family or connexions, I humbly beseech you to pardon me.—If I supposed you to be related to Foreign Powers or Native Boards, it is because you have a manner, a carriage, a dignity, which you will excuse my saying that none but yourself (with the single exception perhaps of the tragic muse, when playing extemporaneously on the barrel organ before the East India company) can parallel. I am not a youth, ma'am, as you see; and although beings like you can never grow old, I venture to presume that we are fitted for each other."

"Really, Kate, my love!" said Mrs. Nickleby faintly, and looking another way.

"I have estates, ma'am," said the old gentleman, flourishing his right hand negligently, as if he made very light of such matters, and speaking very fast; "jewels, light-houses, fishponds, a whalery of my own in the North Sea, and several oysterbeds of great profit in the Pacific Ocean. If you will have the kindness to step down to the Royal Exchange and to take the cocked hat off the stoutest beadle's head, you will find my card in the lining of the crown, wrapped up in a piece of blue paper. My walking stick is also to be seen on application to the chaplain of the House of Commons, who is strictly forbidden to take any money for showing it. I have enemies about me, ma'am," he looked towards his house and spoke very low, "who attack me on all occasions, and wish to secure my property. If you bless me with your hand and heart, you can apply to the Lord Chancellor or call out the military if necessary—sending my toothpick to the

commander-in-chief will be sufficient—and so clear the house of them before the ceremony is performed. After that, love, bliss and rapture; rapture, love and bliss. Be mine, be mine."

Repeating these last words with great rapture and enthusiasm, the old gentleman put on his black velvet cap again, and looking up into the sky in a hasty manner, said something that was not quite intelligible concerning a balloon he expected, and which was rather after its time.

"Be mine, be mine," cried the old gentleman. "Gog and Magog, Gog and Magog. Be mine, be mine!"

"It will be sufficient for me to say, sir," resumed Mrs. Nickleby, with perfect seriousness—"and I am sure you'll see the propriety of taking an answer and going away—that I have made up my mind to remain a widow, and to devote myself to my children. You may not suppose I am the mother of two children—indeed many people have doubted it, and said that nothing on earth could ever make 'em believe it possible—but it is the case, and they are both grown up. We shall be very glad to have you for a neighbour—very glad; delighted, I'm sure—but in any other character it's quite impossible, quite. As to my being young enough to marry again, that perhaps may be so, or it may not be; but I couldn't think of it for an instant, not on any account whatever. I said I never would, and I never will. It's a very painful thing to have to reject proposals, and I would much rather that none were made; at the same time this is the answer that I determined long ago to make, and this is the answer I shall always give."

In the year 1457, a proclamation was issued by Henry the Eighth, "that women should not meet together to babble and talk, and that all men should keep their wives in their houses."

Aaron Burr's Opinion of the English.—In England you see no expression painted on the visage at a concert. All is sombre and grim. They cry bravo! bravissimo! with the same countenance as they curse their servants and their government.

A cube of gold, of little more than five inches on each side, contains the value of £10,000 sterling.

Apples marked with the impression of a leaf are sold in the bazaars of Persia. To produce this impression, a leaf of some flower or shrub is glued or fastened with a thread on several parts of the fruit, while yet growing; the apple gradually ripens, and all that the sun reaches becomes red; the parts covered by the leaves remaining of a pale green or yellow colour.

Poetry often the Precursor and Nurse of Science.—To them that, professing learning, inveigh against poetry, may justly be objected, that they go very near to ungratefulness, to seek to deface that, which in the noblest nations and languages that are known, hath been the first light given to ignorance, and first nurse, whose milk, by little and little, enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledge.—Sir Philip Sydney.

A Narrow Come-off.—Sheridan having declined walking out with an elderly maiden lady, on the pretence of bad weather, was met by the lady afterwards walking by himself. "So Mr. Sheridan," said she, "it has cleared up." "Yes, madam," said he, "enough for one, but not enough for two."

Pleasure a Cheat.—We should have a care of drinking too much: for pleasure, to deceive us, marches before, and conceals her train.—Moulaigne.

The alphabets of different nations contain the following letters:—English, 26—French, 23—Italian, 20—Spanish, 27—German, 26—Slavonic, 27—Russian, 41—Latin, 22—Greek, 24—Hebrew, etc., 22—Arabic, 28—Persian, 32—Turkish, 33—Sanskrit, 50—Chinese, 214.

The first Almanac was made in 1474, by Regiomontanus.

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