

THE DOLEFUL MAN.

A SKETCH.

Joy on, joy on, the footpath way,
And merrily bent the stile—
A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tune in a mile a—

Shakespeare—*Winter's Tale.*

It has been my lot to know Sir George Dismal for many years. He was then precisely as he is now. Time, which has falsified so many of his lugubrious predictions, and disappointed him in his fond anticipations of civic disunion—domestic broil, and every species of

“Moving accidents by field and flood,”

finds him now engaged, soul and body, in harrassing his own mind, and tormenting the spirits of every one around him by continually representing to himself and them, (like the worthy Menedemus in Terence) visions of horror, frightful enough to be classed with the very furie, which can never take place, and for which there is no earthly thing to justify the possibility of their ever happening. Such a man was George Dismal in his moody humors. True to the Englishman's notion of *privilege*, he really would be miserable were he not allowed the indulgence of his whim, which, to do him justice, he certainly exercises to the “top of his bent.”

The first occasion upon which I met Sir George Dismal gave me full insight into his character. I was seated in a box at a well known refectory in London, *chewing the cud* of sweet and bitter coffee, or rather endeavouring to (we have no English word to express the mode or the action. The French have it *avaler*, the only true term,) grind through a viscid and blackish mass, entitled by courtesy and by the master of the establishment, genuine Mocha: when I heard a voice exclaim in an adjoining box, with vast emphasis, the following words,

“Psha! sir, don't tell me! We are going backwards every day. Talk of your march of intellect—a precious humbug! I can see, sir, though you nor you can't—but if you live long enough you will witness the downfall of the English constitution—a sight, sir, to make the angels weep—you will see the crown empty—our parliament dissolved—our form of laws converted into the vilest agrarianism—no king—no lords—no church—but, sir, the country will be governed by a radical mob, headed by Dan O'Connell, who, sir, doubtless is waiting only a fitting opportunity to elevate himself to the post of a Danton, a Marat or Robespierre!”

The last sentence was flanked by a most eloquent rap on the table, and the rear of the whole address brought up with a heavy groan or two.

Presently another voice took up the role.

“My dear Dismal, why should you make yourself so unhappy by these chimerical fancies?—What you affirm, can never take place, and—”

“Not take place, sir,—not take place!—zounds sir, d'ye tell me so, who have made the investigation of passing events the sole study of my life. I see it, sir—I see it plainly!—Farewell for ever to the constitution and laws of old England!” and here was groan the second, “ditto repeated.”

“Ha! ha! George you really make yourself ridiculous—Neither you nor I will ever see what you predict to take place.”

“Very well, sir—very well! laugh away—grin away. You may chance to grin on the other side of your chops—and that too before long!” Whereupon the speaker rose and walked out.

I had finished my vile potation, and was preparing to depart, when my old friend, Harry Somers, tapped me on the shoulder.

“Oh! Harry,” said I “is it you? I thought I recognized your voice.”

“Yes,” said he, “I have just been amusing myself with one of the greatest originals you ever saw.”

“What?” said I, “was it you who held converse with the gentleman who deplored the downfall of the constitution in so touching a manner?”

“Ha! ha! ha!” shouted Harry, “did you overhear our confab?”

“I had the pleasure,” said I.

“And, egad, I've had the *pleasure*, as you call it, of listening to the same thing for the last three years. I was conversing with Sir George Dismal, an old friend of mine; who seizes every opportunity to make himself happily unhappy, by foretelling the advent of all the woes deprecated in the litany.”

“Yes,” said I, “so it would appear from his agrarian government and his apprehensions of O'Connell's Jacobinism.”

“Ha! ha! did you ever hear any thing so ridiculous. But, you have nothing better to do, and relish the induction so much, come and dine with me, and you shall hear the continuation of the play.”

“I assent with pleasure,” said I, and we parted.

At five o'clock I repaired to the chambers of Harry Somers. I found the table laid for three; Harry engaged in torturing a tune from an old German flute, which appeared to contain, from the variety of tone and modulation it possessed, all the properties generally ascribed to the “hurdy-gurdy,” an instrument now becoming, happily obsolete, and the very quintessence of a racked life; in short, the sounds produced were enough to destroy the peace and happiness of all Pentonville. (By the way, how remarkable it is that the musical taste of all single gentlemen should be centred, as it were, upon single chambers and a German flute.) Upon the rug lay Harry's cat, an animal of peculiar sagacity, if we may believe the account of her owner; and the rest of the room displayed all that elegant confusion only to be found in the abode of single gentlemen of a rather brachish inclination. Sir George had not yet made his appearance.

“Ah!” said Harry, discontinuing his diabolical noise, “glad to see you. I expect Dismal every moment. I'd lay an even bet that he brings some awful tale with him.”

Just at that moment, Sir George made his appearance. He advanced towards Harry, and extending one leg, sufficiently well bespattered with black mud, bawled with indignant countenance:

“So sir—here is your march of intellect—your radical reform—your humbug!—this is what it is, to have your penny repositories for enlightening the brains and polishing the minds of the rabble! your mental Day and Martinus!”

“Why George, what's the matter?—How did you get in such a pickle?”

“A pickle!—gad, sir,—it is a pickle!—Why, sir—I'll tell you—and this worthy gentleman to whom I have not yet had an introduction. More degeneracy of the times, though it may be the fashion.”

“Why zounds!” said Harry, “it's all your own fault. You will break out in invectives upon your favorite topicks, before I had an opportunity.”

We were introduced and made our bows.

“Well George, said Somers, “how did you get so bespattered?”

“Why, sir, I'll tell ye—but its only adding another instance to the truth of my predictions, at which you are so often pleased to laugh. I was crossing the street, sir, and the rascally sweeper held out his hat into which I deposited a half-penny. But, sir, that did'nt content the extravagant villain, he actually demanded a penny, and when he found that I would not accede to so exorbitant a demand—by Jove, sir, he whirled round his brush filled with black mud, and discharged it full against my breeches, a black-guard radical, doubtless. You see, sir, that the depravity of the age has reached so far as to dispise the rights of private property!”

“Ha! ha! George—a little water will soon do your business—”

“Yes, sir, a little water may clean my garment—but all the water in the Thames can't wash out the conviction from my mind, that agrarianism—republicanism—atheism—and for aught I know, primitive barbarism, are rapidly striding over the land. S'death, sir, it was but a few nights ago that I adventured near the theatre. Sir, some pick-pocket—the devil confound him—ran off with my handkerchief; and another worthy, who was conducting

me upon the loss of my “*vipe*,” as he was pleased, most classically, to denominate it, had a pluck at my watch. Good heaven, sir, is it not apparent that when the rights of private property are no longer respected, the agrarian system must prevail?”

I was almost choked with suppressed laughter on listening to the lucid display of the rights of private property when dinner being announced, the discourse terminated for the present, Sir George commencing upon another score.

“Harry Somers!—Harry Somers! here is another instance of innovation!—when a private man and a hearty old bachelor dines at half past five!—I would'nt care, sir, about the matter if you were married; for it is very natural to suppose that those mistaken devils who have abandoned the ranks of celibacy, should be compelled to wait the pleasure of their august spouses. Things were different in the good old days of Queen Bess. You saw no affectation of display *there* sir: beef and ale were the commodities which supplied food—you can discover no French or Italian poisons, cooked by a greasy *martré de Cuisine* in a red woollen nightcap—no vintage of sour whey, served up under titles of imposing magnificence—no luxurious couches—no midnight assemblies—and all was then health, prosperity, and cheerfulness. Sir, I could weep, as I witness the decay and degeneracy from those habits which ensured our nation's wealth to the precursive marks of rapid approach towards French Jacobinism!—it *will* come, sir I may not see it—neither may you—but the next generation will witness the downfall of merrie England.”

In this manner did Sir George sustain the table-talk; passing occasionally from national to individual degeneracy. His countenance during the whole time displayed to lugubrious and forlorn an appearance—his groans were so expressive—and his melancholy attempts to grin a smile, which proved, (as the owner intended they should doubtless,) so utterly and entirely abortive, might have justified the supposition that he had borrowed a visage of the illustrious hidulgo, Don Quixote, or had been practising all the woe-begone contortions of aspect with which Liston was wont to delight the pit in Billy Lackaday. The whole scene was most eloquently demonstrative of the title pages of our ancient dramatic authors, being the very personification of a right merrie tragedy, or a most doleful comedy. I looked upon the man with a species, of mixed sensation, which it is impossible to define—not knowing whether to laugh at his absurdity or to pity his misfortune.—Presently a newspaper was brought in—one of those croaking disheartening productions, the very perusal of which, on a November night, might drive a man to commit suicide, especially if he had prefaced it by deluging his viscera with that sour decoction of tansy and catnip, yclept the Chinese herb, but which in most cases, is indigenous to the soil of an English kitchen-garden. Sir George seized it with avidity and presently, with an exclamation of horror, dropped it—

“Good gracious! Dismal, what is the matter?” exclaimed Somers, running towards him.

“Read!—read!” replied Sir George, in an exceedingly faint and desponding tone.

Somers eagerly seized the paper, apprehending immediately the death of some dear friend—there was a dead and silent pause—which was broken by a roar of laughter from Harry.

“Ha! ha! ha!” he shouted—“at it again George?”

“What are you laughing at sir?”—demanded Sir George sternly. “I'm sure there's nothing in *that* to make you laugh I hope?”

“Read it Harry,” I exclaimed.

Harry paused—put on a look of the most eloquent mock-sensibility—and prefacing his speech with dismal ejaculations—proceeded thus:

“Maidstone, Kent. We are sorry to remark the prevailing apprehensions of a short crop. Hops down. Cattle market, &c.”

I could stand this no longer. I shouted till the whole room rang, and Harry was equally affected. Sir George gazed on us with angry countenance, and leaping from his seat, seized his hat, addressing us in fierce indignation: