

THE USELESS CRADLE.

A little, massy-headed, bushy-haired man, with a bluff face, answered to the name of Adam Crofts, the moment the crier of the court pronounced it. He appeared before the commissioners with the view of soliciting their aid to enable him to accomplish what he had failed to effect by any means within his own reach, namely, to compel or induce—he did not care which—a Mrs. Mortimer, a plain-looking woman, seemingly about two-score years of age, to pay him the sum of seven shillings and sixpence, which he alleged she owed him; but which position she totally denied.

Commissioner—What are you, Mr. Crofts?

Mr. Crofts—I am Mr. Crofts, Sir, please your honour.

Commissioner—I did not ask your name.

Mr. Crofts—I beg your vorship's pardon; I thought you did.

Commissioner—What I wish to know is, what are you?

Mr. Crofts (with great surprise)—What am I?

Commissioner—Yes; what are you? The question is a very plain one.

Mr. Crofts—Well, Sir; and didn't I give you a plain answer?

Commissioner—You hav'n't given me any answer at all.

Mr. Crofts (increasingly surprised)—Your vorship's surely mistaken. Didn't I say I was Mr. Crofts?

Commissioner—But how do you live?

Mr. Crofts (looking quite enlightened)—Oh! that's what you mean, Sir, is it?

Commissioner—That's what I mean. Pray, then, answer the question.

Mr. Crofts—Oh, certainly, please your honour. Why, then, I live by my profession.

Commissioner (looking very much surprised)—You don't mean to say you're a professional man?

Mr. Crofts (with a self-complacent smile)—I certainly do, your vorship.

Commissioner—And to which of the professions may you belong?

Mr. Crofts—To the profession of a cradle dealer. (Roars of laughter.)

Commissioner (greatly surprised)—To the what profession?

Mr. Crofts—To the profession of a dealer in cradles. (Renewed laughter.)

The several commissioners on the bench looked at each other, and heartily joined in the general laugh.

Commissioner—Well, this is the first time that I have heard dealing in cradles dignified with the name of a profession. But let that pass; pray what is your claim against this woman?

Mr. Crofts (smoothing his hair with his hand)—I'll tell you in as few words as I can, Sir.

Commissioner—Well, be as brief as possible.

Mr. Crofts—You must know, your vorships, as I makes and sells the best cradles as was ever made or sold; and this 'ere woman, who had only been married six months, comes past my shop where I always keeps a large assortment of cradles of every variety and at all prices, and all warranted town-made, and the best quality as—

Commissioner (interrupting him)—Mr. Crofts, have the goodness to confine yourself to the case before the Court, and don't wander into an eulogium on the merits of your cradles.

Mr. Crofts—I beg your honour's pardon for transgressing (digressing); I'll not forget your polite hint, Sir. (Loud laughter.) Well, as I was a-sayin', she comes one day past my shop door—and I should tell your honours that her husband was with her—and says she to me, says she, "What is the price of your cradles?" Says I to her, "Do you want a cradle, Ma'am?" Says she to me, "Of course I do, or I would not ask you the price of the articles." "Well, dear, I don't think you do at present," suggested Mr. Mortimer, mildly. "I must be the best judge of that myself, I should fancy," answered Mrs. Mortimer, with a contemptuous toss of the head. "No doubt, you must, Ma'am," said I, anxious, as your vorships will readily believe, to do business. "Very well, love," said Mr. Mortimer, soothingly; "if you think you want a cradle, have one by all means." "I may require it by-and-by, and it's just as well to have in the house beforehand," remarked Mrs. Mortimer, in a subdued tone. And, says I, "You're quite right, Ma'am; by all means, you—"

Commissioner—Pray, Mr. Crofts, be so kind as to come to the debt at once, and don't waste the time of the Court with extraneous matter of this kind.

Mr. Crofts—Well, your vorship, I'll tell you the remainder of it in half a minit. Mrs. Mortimer steps into my shop, and pointing to a particular cradle, said, "Vat's the price of that 'ere?" "Nine shillings, and not a farden more nor less," says I. "It's not worth it," says she. "I tell you vat it is, Ma'am; if you get as good a cradle as that von in this 'ere town at the money, I'll make a present of it to you gratis for nothing." (Loud laughter.) "I'll only give you—"

The Court—Really this is insufferable trifling with the Court. Don't tell us anything about what you asked, or what she offered, but say at once, did the defendant buy the cradle, and what did she give you for it?

Mr. Crofts—Bless your honours' hearts, she didn't give me

nothin' at all for it, and that's the reason vy I have brought her here to-day. (Renewed laughter.)

Commissioner—Tell us, then, what she engaged to give?

Mr. Crofts—She engaged to give me seven-and sixpence, and to—

Mrs. Mortimer—It's all false, your honours; and so it is; I never bought the cradle at all.

Mr. Mortimer—It's all false, your vorships; she never bought the cradle at all.

Mr. Crofts (surprised, and with much energy)—There, now; there's a couple for your vorships! She *did* buy the cradle.

Mrs. Mortimer (with great vehemence)—I did not, you lying rascal. You sent it to us without being ordered.

Here the Court suggested to the defendant that she must not allow herself to be carried away by any temporary heat, and Mrs. Mortimer nodded to the Court in token of her intention to act to the suggestion.

A Commissioner—Did you, Mr. Crofts, send the cradle to the defendant without her having concluded a bargain with you first?

Mr. Crofts—I'll tell you how it is, Sir. I said the harticle was as vell worth nine shillings as it was worth twopence-half-penny.

"Seven-and-sixpence is the outside value of it," says she. "Let me send it to you, and you can pay it at any other time," says I.

"Seven-and-sixpence," again said she; "I wouldn't give a farthin' more for it." And so saying, her husband, who spoke very little, and herself quitted my premises. sent her the cradle next day saying I would accept her offer.

Commissioner—When was this?

Mr. Crofts—Eighteen months ago.

Mrs. Mortimer—Don't believe him, gentlemen; it was only seventeen months and some odd days. (A laugh.)

Commissioner—Well, Mrs. Mortimer, you appear to have got the cradle at your own price; what are the grounds on which you refuse to pay the money?

Defendant—I never made the bargain; he did not accept the offer when I made it; and therefore I was not bound to take the article next day.

Commissioner—But why then did you let the cradle into the house? Why did you not return it at once?

Mrs. Mortimer—I did not like to be uncivil, your honours; but I sent a message to him next day to come and fetch the cradle away, as I did not want it. He may have it now.

Mr. Crofts—But I *won't* at this 'ere distance of time. She would now return it, because as how she has no prospect of ever having a little inhabitant to it. (Peals of laughter, during which Mrs. Mortimer looked quite savage at the distinguished vender of cradles.)

Mrs. Mortimer—You're nothing but an impertinent—

The Court—Mrs. Mortimer, we cannot allow any such expressions! you must restrain yourself while here.

Mrs. Mortimer, putting her handkerchief to her eyes, sobbed out—"It's werry, werry difficult to do, Sir."

It was eventually decided that as Mr. Crofts had not accepted Mrs. Mortimer's first offer, but sent the cradle next day when she had changed her mind as to the probability of requiring a cradle at all as a piece of household furniture, and as the cradle had never been used, Mr. Crofts must take back the article, and try to dispose of it to some other customer.

"To some one who will have use for it," sighed Mrs. Mortimer.

"Vich is more than you ever vill," growled Mr. Crofts, as he turned about to waddle out of the court, manifestly chop-fallen at the result of his case. As Mrs. Mortimer left the court, she was overheard to say to a female acquaintance, that she would never again bargain for any article merely because she might possibly at some future day want it; and to express her regret that she should have priced the cradle, or bought, as she had done a quantity of baby's clothes before she was justified in believing they should be required.

THE ALARM OF POISON.—Kemble, in the zenith of his fame, playing Hamlet at Newcastle, when Bensley, who was the leading actor of that company, had the honour to be cast the Ghost. Kemble's high popularity made him, of course, a vast bugbear in a country theatre; and Bensley was much annoyed at having to second the greatness of such an artist. Accordingly, he studied the part of the Ghost, having got but short notice, in great tribulation, almost up to the hour of performance; amazingly tormented by an apprehension that the affair would, in some way or other, injure his reputation. When the time came for dressing, Bensley's fears were not abated. He put on the Ghost's leather armour, which fitted him horribly; swearing by turns at the Ghost, the armour, and the manager; and all the while, at intervals, repeating fragments from his part, as to his accuracy even in the text of which he was by no means entirely satisfied. At length the curtain rang up, and it occurred to Bensley that a moderate draught, taken in time, might give him firmness; and thereupon—still repeating his part at intervals—he summoned the call-boy to his aid. "Boy" (calling), "mark me!" (repeating)

"if ever thou didst thy dear father love" (this was out of the character.) "I am not in the habit of taking strong liquors on nights when I perform; but, prithee, go to the public-house next door, and get me a glass of brandy and water." When the brandy and water came, the first scene of the play being going on all this while, Bensley, who had still the book in his hand, studying, drank it off at a single draught; but, as he set the empty glass down, to his surprise, and rather indignation, he perceived a strong red sediment lying at the bottom of it. Bensley was not a man to be trifled with. He immediately sent the glass back to "The Crown," from whence it came, desiring moreover to know what the landlord meant by offering him so filthy a potation. Within the next minute he was called to go upon the stage; and, still grumbling about the liquor and the character, he walked down stairs, and made his entry as the buried Majesty of Denmark; but no sooner had John Kemble, with "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" started on one side, than his eye caught the landlady of "The Crown" in the wings on the other, wringing her hands, and throwing her person into dreadful distortions, and calling on him for heaven's sake to come off. Bensley made up his mind; that the woman, as well as all the rest of the world, was frantic; and went on with his part as well as he could, it being in that scene only dumb show; beckoning and signing to Hamlet very solemnly with his truncheon, and looking cannon-balls the other way at the landlady, who was so vociferous as to be heard almost at the back of the gallery. At length the time of exit came—"What the devil, madam, is the matter with you?" "The matter!—Oh, Mr. Bensley!—Oh, forgive me—on my knees—miserable sinner that I am!" "Why, what in the name of the fiend ails the woman?—get up." "The glass—the brandy and water—the glass—red arsenic—Oh, sir, you are poisoned!" "Poisoned!" "Oh, yes—oh, forgive me!—My eldest daughter sent the glass on the shelf, with red arsenic for the rats; I mixed it in the dusk—there was no candle—oh, on my knees!" As the written part dropped from Bensley's hand, the scene had shifted, and Kemble added himself to the party. "Come, Bensley, the stage is waiting." "Sir, I can't help that: I'm poisoned." "Oh, poisoned!—Nonsense—the people, my dear sir, are hissing in the pit." "Sir, I—what can I do?—I tell you I'm poisoned—I'm in the agonies of death!" "Well, but, my dear Mr. Bensley, if you are poisoned, you can play this one scene. What are we to do?" And, in the end, Mr. Kemble, who did not know well what it all meant, absolutely hurried Bensley on the stage, and they began the scene together, Bensley playing the Ghost, under the full conviction that, in five minutes, he should be a ghost in earnest. The play, under these auspicious circumstances, proceeds—

Ham. Whether wilt thou lead me? Speak I'll go no further!

Ghost. Mark me!—(Aside—) I believe I shan't be able to go much farther).

Ham. Alas, poor ghost!

Ghost. I am thy father's spirit.—(Aside—) Oh, that horrible brandy and water! I am dying).

Ham. (Aside)—Nonsense—stay a little—you'd descend directly.

Ghost. (Aside)—I can't go on.

Ham. (Aside)—Then you had better go off—I'll apologise.

Mr. Kemble then comes forward, and tells the house that Mr. Bensley is suddenly indisposed. In the mean time a surgeon has been sent for, who examines the poisonous glass and declares that whatever it contains, it is innocent of arsenic. In the end the call-boy is again produced, when it turns out that the peccant vessel was not the landlady's of the Crown at all, but that the messenger had himself carried a glass for the brandy and water with him from the theatre, and had, moreover, accidentally taken that which contained the rose-pink, mixed to make "blood" for the murderers in the ensuing pantomime.—*Mathew's Entertainments*.

LOVERS.—People who are in love with each other, wonder that third persons should discover their sentiments. They fancy themselves in a sort of Calypso's Island, and are astonished when a strange sail is seen approaching the coast. There is, in point of fact, no paradise that has such a low and thin fence as this; every passer-by can see through it.

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