

COMIC ANNUAL.

BARBER COX AND THE CUTTING OF HIS COMB.

This is the gem of the book, and full of warmth, as of comicality are its rays. The good feeling in it is equal to the mirth. An honest, vulgar, good-hearted barber of Oxford street falls into a fortune in February, and out of it in November; and discovers that the two happiest months of the year were January, before he left his shop, and December, when he went back to it. He tells his own story, with a mixture of aspiring vulgarity and contented simplicity that is very ludicrous and remarkably pleasant. The one he owes to his wife, the other to himself.

Let us give the reader a notion of the party that attended the first rout of Mr. and Mrs. Coxe Coxe ("that's the way, double your name, and stick an 'e' to the end of it, and you are a gentleman at once"), in Portland place.

"Let me see, there was, first, my Lord Dumboozle, an Irish peer, and his seven sons, the Honourable Messieurs Trumper (two only to dinner); there was Count Mace, the celebrated French nobleman, and his Excellency Baron Von Punter, from Baden; there was Lady Blanche Bluenose, the eminent literati, author of "The Distrusted," "The Distorted," "The Disgusted," "The Disreputable One," and other poems; there was a Dowager-Lady Max, and her daughter, the Honourable Miss Adelaide Bluering; Sir Charles Codshhead, from the city; and Field-Marshal Sir Gormon O'Gallagher, K. A., K. B., K. C., K. W., K. X., in the service of the republic of Guatemala; my friend Tagrag, and his fashionable acquaintances, little Tom Tuffthunt, made up the party; and when the doors were flung open, and Mr. Hoek, in black, with a white napkin, three footmen, coachman, and a lad, whom Mrs. C. had dressed in sugar loaf buttons, and called a page, were seen round the dinner table, all in white gloves, I promise you I felt a thrill of elation, and thought to myself—Sam Cox, Sam Cox, who ever would have expected to see you here?"

The thrill of elation is all a sham to please his wife. He longs for the familiar society of Orlando Crump, his old journeyman, to whom he had generously handed over his old business; but he dares not say so, for Mrs. Cox won't hear of it. Orlando has aspired to "Jemimarann," and this Mrs. C. thinks an inexpiable presumption. Captain Tagrag—a runaway lodger from the Oxfordstreet shop whom the news of Portland place suddenly casts up again, and who tenders his services to introduce Mr. and Mrs. C. C. to fashionable life—is the chosen man.

In such hands poor Cox's condition may be imagined. He is fleeced on all sides, made pigeon and butt for everybody, and tries with a constant and most amusing effort to think himself supremely happy and successful all the while. His "day with the Surrey Hounds," his "finishing-touch" at Billiards, and his "drop-scene at the opera," are all capital. As a sporting man and a man of fashion he had his newspaper of course, and, equally of course, it is a newspaper eminent for its extensive correspondence. "I was a constant reader," observes Mr. Cox, "of the Notices to Correspondents, and, my early education having been rather neglected, (for I was taken from my studies and set, as is the custom in our trade, to practise on a sheep's head at the tender age of nine years, before I was allowed to venture on the human countenance,) I say being thus curtailed and cut off in my classical learning, I must confess I managed to pick up a pretty smattering of genteel information from that treasury of all sorts of knowledge, at least sufficient to make me a match in learning for all the noblemen and gentlemen who came to our house."

As a man of fashion, we need scarcely add, Mr. Coxe Coxe has sent his only and youthful son to a tip-top fashionable school, where, with his wife, he pays him a visit in June. The description of this visit is done with exquisite truth and humour.

"Mr. Coddler used to send monthly accounts of his pupil's progress, and if Tug was not a wonder of the world, I don't know who was. It was

General behaviour.....excellent.
English.....very good.
French.....tres bien.
Latin.....optimé,

and so on:—he possessed all the virtues, and wrote to us every month for money. My dear Jemmy and I determined to go and see him, after he had been at school a quarter; and we went, and were shown by Mr. Coddler, one of the meekest, smilingest little men I ever saw, into the bed-rooms and eating-rooms (the dromitaries and refractories he called them), which were all as comfortable as comfortable might be. "It is a holiday to-day," said Mr. Coddler; and a holiday it seemed to be,—in the dining-room were half a dozen young gentlemen playing at cards ('all tip-top nobility,' observed Mr. Coddler); in the bed-rooms there was only one gent., he was lying on his bed, reading novels and smoking cigars. 'Extraordinary genius!' whispered Coddler; 'Honourable Tom Fitz-Warter, cousin of Lord Byron's; smokes all day; and has written the sweetest poems you can imagine. Genius, my dear madam, you know, genius must have its way.' 'Well, upon upon my word,' says Jemmy, 'if that's genius, I had rather that Master Tuggeridge Coxe Tuggeridge remained a dull fellow.'

'Impossible, my dear madam,' said Coddler, 'Mr. Tuggeridge Coxe couldn't be stupid if he tried.'

Just then comes Lord Claude Lollypop, third son of the Mar-

quess of Allycompane. We were introduced instantly. 'Lord Claude Lollypop, Mr. and Mrs. Coxe:' the little lord wagged his head, my wife bowed very low, and so did Mr. Coddler, who, as he saw my lord making for the play-ground, begged him to show us the way. 'Come along,' says my lord; and as he walked before us, whistling, we had leisure to remark the beautiful holes in his jacket, and elsewhere.

About twenty young noblemen (and gentlemen) were gathered round a pastrycook's shop, at the end of the green. 'That's the grub-shop,' said my Lord, 'where we young gentlemen wot has money buys our wittles, and them young gentlemen wot has none, goes tick.'

Then we passed a poor red-haired usher, sitting on a bench alone. 'That's Mr. Hicks, the husher, ma'am,' says my lord, 'we keep him, for he's very useful to throw stones at, and he keeps the chaps' coats when there's a fight, or a game at cricket. Well, Hicks, how's your mother? what's the row now?' 'I believe, my lord,' says the usher, very meekly, 'there is a pugilistic encounter somewhere on the premises; the honourable Mr. Mac—'

'O! come along,' said Lord Lollypop, 'come along, this way, ma'am! Go it, ye cripples!' and my lord pulled my dear Jemmy's gown in the kindest and most familiar way, she trotting on after him, mightily pleased to be so taken of, and I after her. A little boy went running across the green. 'Who is it, Petitoes?' screams my lord. 'Turk and the barber,' pipes Petitoes, and runs to the pastrycook's like mad. 'Turk and the ba---,' laughs out my lord, looking at us: 'hurra! this way, ma'am;' and, turning round a corner, he opened a door into a court-yard, where a number of boys were collected, and a great noise of shrill voices might be heard. 'Go it, Turk!' says one. 'Go it, barber!' says another. 'Punch hith life out!' roars another, whose voice was just cracked, and his clothes half a yard too short for him!"

This was a fight between Master Coxe and the Honourable Arthur Mac Turk, and the accomplishments concerned in it were all that "Tug" brought away from Coddlers. That they were not altogether useless let another richly painted scene declare. The party of Coxes are on their way to Paris, and, having just been cheated in Thames street by the insolent coachman who carried the ladies, are addressed by the amiable cabman who brought the gentlemen.

"I was going after them. 'Stop, Mr. Ferguson,' pipes a young gentleman of about thirteen, with a red livery waistcoat that reached to his ankles; 'Stop, Mr. Heff,' says he, taking a small pipe out of his mouth, 'and don't forget the cabman.'

'What's your fare, my lad?' says I.

'Why, let's see—yes—ho!—my fare's seven-and-thirty and eight-pence, eggs—ackly.'

The fourteen gentlemen, holding the luggage, here burst out and laughed very rudely indeed; and the only person who seemed disappointed was, I thought, the hackney coachman. "Why, you rascal!" says Jemmy, laying hold of the boy, 'do you want more than the coachman?'

'Don't rascal me, marm!' shrieks the little chap, in return. 'What's the coach to me? Vy, you may go in an omnibus for six-pence if you like; vy don't you go and buss it, marm? Vy did you call my cab, marm? Vy am I to come forty mile, from Scarlet-street, Po't'nd place, and not git my fare, marm? Come, give me a suffering and a half, and don't keep my boss a-vaiting all day.'

This speech, which takes some time to write down, was made in about the fifth part of a second; and, at the end of it, the young gentleman hurled down his pipe, and, advancing towards Jemmy, doubled his fist, and seemed to challenge her to fight. My dearest girl now turned from red to as pale as white Windsor, and a fell into my arms: what was I to do? I called, Policeman! but a policeman won't interfere in Thames street; robbery is licensed there, what was I to do? Oh! my heart beat with paternal gratitude when I think of what my Tug did!

As soon as this young cab chap put himself into a fighting attitude, Master Tuggeridge Coxe—who had been standing by, laughing very rudely I thought—Master Tuggeridge Coxe, I say, flung his jacket suddenly into his mamma's face (the brass buttons made her start, and recovered her a little), and, before we could say a word was in the ring in which we stood, (formed by the porters, nine orangemen and women, I don't how many newspaper boys, hotel cads, and old clothesmen), and, whirling about two little white fists in the face of the gentleman in the red waistcoat, who brought a great pair of black ones up to bear on the enemy, was engaged in an instant.

But, law bless you! Tug hadn't been at Richmond school for nothing; and milled away—one, two, right and left—like a little hero as he is, with all his dear mother's spirit in him: first came a crack which sent a long dusky white hat, that looked damp and deep like a well, and had a long black crape rag twisted round it—first came a crack which sent this white hat spinning over the gentleman's cab, and scattered among the crowd a vast number of things which the cabman kept in it,—such as a ball of string, a piece of candle, a comb, a whip-lash, a little warbler, a slice of bacon, &c. &c.

The cabman seemed sadly ashamed of this display, but Tug gave him no time; another blow was planted on his cheek-bone; and a shird, which hit him straight on the nose, sent this rude cabman traight down to the ground.

'Brayvo, my lord!' shouted all the people round.

'I won't have no more, thank yer,' said the litile cabman, gathering himself up, 'give us over my fare, vil ye, and let me git away.'

'What's your fare now, you cowardly little thief?' says Tug.

'Vy, then, two and eightence,' says he, 'go along,—you know it is;' and two and eightpence he had; and every body applauded Tug, and hissed the cab-boy, and asked Tug for something to drink."

After the festivities of Paris poor Coxe's grandeur and misery approach their close. Behold him in the King's Bench in November, stripped of his estates, and quite deserted by his barons and counts, captains and foreign ambassadors.

"I could not help saying now to my dear wife, 'See, my love, we have both been gentlefolks for exactly a year, and a pretty life we have had of it. In the first place, my darling, we gave grand dinners, and every body laughed at us.'

'We asked great company, and they insulted us.'

'And spoilt mamma's temper,' said Jemimarann.

'Hush! Miss,' said her mother, 'we don't want your advice.'

'Then you must make a country gentleman of me.'

'And send pa into dunghills,' roared Tug.

'Then you must go to operas, and pick up foreign Barons and Counts.'

'O, thank heaven! dearest papa, that we are rid of them,' cries my little Jemimarann, looking almost happy, and kissing her old pappy.

'And you must make a fine gentleman of Tug there, and send him to a fine school.'

'And I give you my word,' says Tug, 'I'm as ignorant a chap as ever lived.'

'You're an insolent saucebox,' says Jemmy, 'you've learned that at your fine school.'

'I've learned something else, too, ma'am, 'ask the boys if I haven't,' grumbles Tug.

'You hawk your daughter about, and just escape marrying her to a swindler.'

'And drive off poor Orlando,' whimpered my girl.

'Silence, Miss,' says Jemmy, fiercely.

'You insult the man whose father's property you inherited, and bring me into this prison, without hope of leaving it; for he never can help us after all your bad language.' I said all this very smartly; for the fact is, my blood was up at the time, and I determined to rate my dear girl soundly.

'Oh! Sammy,' said she, sobbing (for the poor thing's spirit was quite broken), 'it's all true; I've been very foolish and vain, and I've punished my dear husband and children by my follies, and I do so, so repent them! Here Jemimarann at once burst out crying, and flung herself into her mamma's arms, and the pair roared and sobbed for ten minutes together; even Tug looked queer; and as for me, it's a most extraordinary thing, but I'm blest if seeing them so miserable didn't meke me quite happy. I don't think, for the whole twelve months of our good fortune, I had ever felt so gay as in that dismal room, in the Fleet, where I was locked up."

And now it is that Cox is needlessly assured of what he never doubted, the faithful heart of Orlando Crump.

"Poor Orlando Crump came to see us every day; and we, who had never taken the slightest notice of him in Portland place, and treated him so cruelly that day, at Beulah Spa, were only too glad of his company now. He used to bring books for my girl, and a bottle of sherry for me; and he used to take home Jemmy's fronts, and dress them for her; and when locking up time came, he used to see the ladies home to their little three pair bed-rooms in Holborn, where they slept now, Tug and all. 'Can the bird forget its nest?' Orlando used to say, (he was a romantic young fellow, that's the truth, and blew the flute and read Lord Byron, incessantly, since he was separated from Jemimarann); 'Can the bird, let loose in Eastern climes, forget its home? Can the rose cease to remember its beloved bulbul?—Ah! no. Mr. Cox, you made me what I am, and what I hope to die—a hairdresser. I never see a curling-irons before I entered your shop, or knew Naples from brown Windsor. Did you not make over your house, your furniture, your emporium of perfumery, and nine-and-twenty shaving customers, to me? Are these trifles? Is Jemimarann a trifle? if she will allow me to call her so. O, Jemimarann! your pa found me in the workhouse, and made me what I am. Conduct me to my grave, and I never never shall be different! When he had said this, Orlando was so much affected, that he rushed suddenly on his hat, and quitted the room.

Then Jemimarann began to cry too. 'O, pa!' said she, 'isn't he, isn't he a nice young man?'

Need we say what follows? There is a marriage and a Christmas bustle in the old shop in Oxford street, and Barber Cox is left all the better for the 'Cutting of his Comb.'

Guilt, though it may attain temperal splendour, can never confer real happiness; the evil consequences of our crimes long survive their commissions; while the paths of virtue, though seldom those of worldly greatness, are always those of pleasantness and peace.—*Sir Walter Scott.*