

man internally agitated and anxious for the completion of a scheme which had cost some mental labour, a horseman was perceived entering the town at the opposite end, at a slashing pace, his hair hanging in long loose knots something after the manner of rope yarns, the perspiration trickling down his lank cheeks, and the whole appearance of horse and rider denoting they had travelled with much despatch; five minutes had scarcely elapsed from their first appearance ere the stranger suddenly pulled up at the door of the Doctor's, and in another second, was closeted with that learned personage. Ten minutes had scarcely elapsed when both were seen to hurry out of the house, mount their steeds, and clapping spurs into their flanks, the town was soon left far behind. To suppose that such an occurrence could happen, without exciting a very lively sensation amongst his neighbours, would indeed be a libel upon the inquisitive inhabitants of this quizzical little town. Numerous, indeed, were the conjectures, but all seemed too vague to gain more than partial credence; the most general opinion was that started by some good old ladies, and these, I say it my fair readers with deference, are never wanting on such occasions, who, by a course of reasonings and deductions, I do not at the moment remember, very clearly demonstrated that the stranger was no less a personage than the confidential clerk of His Satanic Majesty, bearing despatches of moment from head quarters to Governor Spot. Still, at the same time, I am bound to declare, that one or two very obstinate young men, (and young men are sometimes *very* obstinate,) shutting their ears and blinding their eyes to conviction, insisted that the stranger was the liveried servant of a neighbouring Squire, bringing intelligence to the Doctor, that his professional services were required in a case in which ladies *only* needed his skill. Be this as it may, as the impartial recorder of facts, I am bound to state that there were two opinions, but for my own part, I rather incline to that of the said old ladies; for how should a man enter a town at night, on horseback, at a slashing pace, his hair hanging over his face, and above all, stop at the door of Dr. Spot, and that person "be after any good."

It happened on the same evening, that the otherwise quiet town of Oswestry, had been so greatly disturbed by the above mysterious circumstance, that six worthy burghers had assembled in the best parlour of the "Labour in Vain," to discuss the affairs of the parish—they being the officers elect, for the time being, and having voted that sixpence a-day, for the support of a poor widow and two children, as granted by their predecessors, was exorbitant, and, consequently, unanimously agreeing that in future it should be reduced to fourpence; and also taking into consideration the case of a man who had obtained a coffin at the parish expense, he having represented his wife had died of cholera, and when, of course, none of the officials ventured to see

the body, but who immediately on receipt of the coffin had by the aid of his said wife (of course miraculously resuscitated,) set to and speedily reduced it into the more useful, and to them, profitable shape of matches, all which called forth a very learned speech from the overseer upon the profligacy of the times; there being no further business before the Board, the question was put, seconded, and carried, "that after their arduous duties, the Board do enjoy themselves at the parish expense, after the most approved method of such meetings in general; and which Mrs. Wiggins was immediately ordered to serve up in the "Labour in Vain's" *best*. Supper being ended, and pipes and porter introduced, the conversation turned upon the prevailing topics then current in Oswestry, and of course the circumstances above narrated were not forgotten.

"I say I should not be at all surprised," exclaimed the fat overseer, after a long desultory conversation on this subject; "I shouldn't be at all surprised, on rising some morning, to find the house, owner and all vanished."

"Why, it was only last night," observed a piece of rotundity holding the office of churchwarden, but resembling very much a bear with a frill round his neck; "as I was passing his house, on the opposite side, that I heard a most dismal howl, followed by a low guttural moan, and immediately a faint shriek, when all was silent as the grave."

"No you don't say so!" exclaimed a little nervous functionary opposite, looking rather anxiously around the room, and gradually edging nearer the rest; "you don't mean to say that, Mr. Higgins?"

"But I do," replied the churchwarden, throwing the dust from his pipe, "and even this very night, as Mr. Sykes and I were on our road here, we saw a *something* enter the town, and flying."

"Flying!" interrupted the audience in a breath.

"Aye, flying past us like a flash o' lightning," continued the warden; "and entering Dick Spot's house; in less than five seconds they were both flying back again; for my part, I think his time was come, for—" Here the warden's eye rolled cautiously around the room, and a general approach towards each other was the consequence; then added, in an under tone, "Mr. Sykes says he saw the club foot."

"No, did he though?" exclaimed the now alarmed vestrymen.

"How dark it's getting," added the aforesaid nervous functionary; "I wish I was home, without having to pass his house."

"What was that shot by the window?" exclaimed another, in evident alarm.

All started from their seats, and seizing the tongs, fire-shovels, chairs, &c. like valiant and desperate men, stood prepared for the worst.

There was no time for conjecture—the sound of footsteps ascending the stairs, fell on the ears of the