

1837

Tulrumbles and Oliver Twises: Review of The Public Life of Mr. Tulrumbles and Oliver Twists

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Repository Citation

Tucker, N. Beverley, "Tulrumbles and Oliver Twises: Review of The Public Life of Mr. Tulrumbles and Oliver Twists" (1837). *Faculty Publications*. 1351.

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'TULRUMBLE AND OLIVER 'TWIST.

The Public Life of Mr. Tulumble, once Mayor of Mudfog. By Boz. With other Tales and Sketches from Bentley's Miscellany and the Library of Fiction. Philadelphia. Carey, Lea & Blanchard.

Oliver Twist, or the Parish Boy's Progress. By Boz. With other Tales and Sketches from Bentley's Miscellany, and the Library of Fiction. Philadelphia. Carey, Lea & Blanchard.

A writer, who chooses to be known to the literary world by the name of "Boz," has, for some time past, been exhibiting his antics before the public. We have never sought his acquaintance, for the same reason that we should avoid a fellow who might thrust himself into an assembly room, and invite the notice of the company by the dress and grimaces of a Merry-Andrew. We would ask ourselves, in such a case, what man, capable of refinement, would choose to be a buffoon?—What man, possessing a particle of self-respect, would descend to an exhibition so degrading and disgusting? We should certainly suspect the intruder to be some clown of a circus, or bear-garden, escaped from his employer, and hold ourselves in readiness, at the first hint from the managers, to put him out.

Can we be blamed for coming to a somewhat similar conclusion in the case of a writer who thinks proper to announce himself by such a mountebank designation as that of "Boz?" What right has he that we should suppose him anything better than the Jack-Pudding of a drunken club?

The reader may ask, "How then it comes that we take any notice of the volumes before us?" We answer as follows: They were laid upon our table, and, on taking up one of them, we found, on what should have been a blank page at the end, a publisher's notice of "The posthumous papers of the PICKWICK CLUB, containing a faithful record of the perambulations, perils, adventures, and sporting transactions of the corresponding members. Edited by Boz. The very great demand for this humorous work," &c. Also, "A new edition of the TUGGS AT RAMSGATE, embracing the last sketches of every day life, and every day people. By Boz. The first edition being entirely exhausted."

Appended to these notices was the following from the *Metropolitan Magazine* :

"We cannot too strongly recommend these facetious works. They are perfect pictures of the morals, manners and habits of a great portion of English society. It is hardly possible to conceive a more pleasantly reading miscellany—delightful from the abundance of its sly humor, and instructive in every chapter. * * * Taken altogether, we have rarely met with works that have pleased us more, and we know that our taste is always that of the public."

Thus admonished, it behooved us, who live by the favor of the public, and whose duty it is to minister to the public taste, to avail ourselves of this opportunity to improve our acquaintance with it. Instead of being called upon by the master of ceremonies to aid in ejecting the intruder, behold he is introduced to us by the manager himself, as a gentleman of the first fashion, whom not to know would argue ourselves unknown.

We are always ready to defer to authority, though we cannot lay aside our tastes. We determined, therefore, to man ourselves to the task, and to make the acquaintance of the grotesque stranger. Yet we had our misgivings, and wished to qualify ourselves, on the easiest terms, to say that we were acquainted with this very popular and much admired Mr. Boz. Observing that in each of the volumes before us there was one tale, and one only from his pen, and finding that one of these consisted of eighteen, and the other of twenty-five pages, small duodecimo, we took up the volumes with a light heart, and went to work with something like the same consolation with which Fergus M'Ivor went to the scaffold. "Let them spin out the business as they will," said he, "they cannot make it last much over half an hour."

Thus it was that we became acquainted with the "Public Life of Mr. Tulrumbles," and the "Progress of Oliver Twist, the Parish Boy." The result of this was, that we were not only confirmed in our suspicions of the true character of the writer, but that our indignation was strongly excited against the critic who had palmed him on our notice. We felt called upon to expose the one and denounce the other as proper objects for the contempt and indignation of the public. To qualify ourselves for this duty, and to secure ourselves against any possibility of injustice, we undertook and faithfully accomplished the loathsome task of reading these volumes through. Having completed it, we determined that if, from this time forth, any of our readers suffers himself to be cheated out of his money or his time by Mr. Boz himself, or any of his associates, aiders and abettors, it shall not be our fault.

The first of the tales, from the pen of Boz himself, is introduced by the following passage :

"Mudfog is a pleasant town—a remarkably pleasant town—situated in a charming hollow by the side of a river, from which river, Mudfog derives an agreeable scent of pitch, tar, coals, and rope-yarn, a roving population in oil-skin hats, a pretty steady influx of drunken bargemen, and a great many other maritime advantages. There is a good deal of water about Mudfog, and yet it is not exactly the sort of town for a watering place, either. Water is a perverse sort of element at the best of times, and in Mudfog it is particularly so. In winter it comes oozing down the streets and tumbling over the fields,—nay, rushes into the very cellars and kitchens of the houses, with a lavish prodigality that might well be dispensed with; but in the hot summer weather it will dry up, and turn green; and although green is a very good

color in its way, especially in grass, still it certainly is not becoming to water; and it cannot be denied that the beauty of Mudfog is rather impaired, even by this trifling circumstance. Mudfog is a healthy place—very healthy;—damp, perhaps, but none the worse for that. It's quite a mistake to suppose that damp is unwholesome: plants thrive best in damp situations, and why shouldn't men? The inhabitants of Mudfog are unanimous in asserting that there exists not a finer race of people on the face of the earth; here we have an indisputable and veracious contradiction of the vulgar error at once. So, admitting Mudfog to be damp, we distinctly state that it is salubrious."

In this place lives a man who, by quiet industry, has raised himself from poverty to wealth, and in due season is chosen mayor of the town. He has just before witnessed a Lord Mayor's procession in London, and determines to have a pageant of his own. In this attempt he makes himself ridiculous of course. In the hands of Mr. Boz, to whom nothing is ridiculous that is not preposterous, and nothing absurd merely because it is unnatural or impossible, the thing is so managed, that we can hardly conceive how it could provoke a smile, except from one to whom the highest of all entertainments would be a grinning match. The cream of the joke is, that Tulrumbles gets a suit of brazen armor, and dresses up in it a fellow who gets drunk, and behaves like a drunkard, and so the pageant ends. Tulrumbles attempts reforms, and becomes unpopular—then gives up the attempt and recovers his standing. This is the whole story. The drunkenness of the man in armor is the only incident.

Oliver Twist is a boy born in a workhouse, of a mother, (a nameless vagrant,) to whom his birth is fatal. It seems that this is but an introductory chapter, consisting of sneers at the poor laws and their ministers, and a history of what Oliver *did* and what he *did not* eat. The only incident is, that he once ventured to ask for more. The story stops short, without telling the consequence of this interesting and important occurrence.

Such are the tales. For the manner and execution, we refer to the passage quoted above. We are not sure that these are not the worst stories in the two volumes. But the rest, with one exception, are nearly of the same character, and if they are not equally bad, it would seem to be because the writers could not make them so. They certainly strove hard to do it.

They all have this common quality of being the worst told stories that we ever read. There is scarcely one of them of which a marginal abstract would not be decidedly better than the tale itself as told—not one that would not be improved by being condensed into one or two pages. Such of them as are worth telling at all, might be told over a bottle at midnight, and a good story teller would not give five minutes to one of them. Many would be best told in one sentence. Take this for example :

"Richie Barter was a merchant's clerk, who ruined himself by marrying his master's widow, thinking he had left her 40,000*l.*, when her whole legacy was 500*l.*"

Is that the whole story? Yes. No incident? None. No character? Nothing like it. The writers of this school have no idea of character, beyond the grand division of fools and knaves—bullies and cowards. Of any modifications and minglings of qualities, they seem to have no conception. Of such at least they make no exhibition, though personages are occasionally introduced, which we may suppose (as the contrary is not made to appear,) to be men and women such as God

makes. But these do but come on the stage and go off again like a servant or messenger in a play, without attracting the notice of the author or the audience.

We would not willingly have our veracity suspected, and we cannot venture to vindicate it by giving extracts, at once extravagant and dull, preposterous, yet not ludicrous. We feel, therefore, that it becomes us to account for that sort of popularity which encourages such writers to put forth their trash upon the public, and secures them such a sale as makes their works more profitable to the bookseller than others of greater merit.

We take it, that there is nothing that tradesmen like so well as quick returns. This is true of booksellers as well as others, and therefore nothing suits the bookseller better than a work for which a ready market is afforded by the city where he publishes. On such sales he saves all discounts and commissions, and thus secures to himself not only a quick return, but a larger profit, than on books which must be sent abroad in quest of purchasers.

We have said that, with a single exception, none of these tales is much better than those which we have abridged, though none of them is, *perhaps*, so excellently bad as those two. The excepted tale is called Edward Saville, and is by Charles Whitehead. We have never met with Mr. Whitehead before, and should be happy to cultivate his acquaintance, had we not found him in such company. We hope he was lugged into it against his will, or at least blundered into it by mistake. His little tale really surprised us as much as would the appearance of a genuine diamond among the glass beads and tinsel trumpery of a woman of the town.

We have a double purpose in mentioning it. It is short, and might be read, while standing on one foot, at a bookseller's counter, and might be the means of cheating some man of taste into the purchase of the work. We hope that all such among our readers may escape that imposition by means of this notice. We are moreover bound to return our acknowledgments to Mr. Whitehead for the pleasure we experienced in reading this little production; and we would requite it by a word of advice. He has heard the adage *noscitur a socio*. They, whose names are connected with his, will not be judged of by *him*. Mr. Boz is obviously the criterion writer by whom the rest would like to be estimated. We can hardly think that Mr. Whitehead would choose to be valued by the same standard. We therefore warn him against his associates, and call upon him to "come out from among them, for he is not of them."

This advice will probably never reach him, but it may be of service to our readers hereafter to recognize the name of Mr. Charles Whitehead as that of one who can write and does write interestingly, and in good taste. It may serve an opposite and more important purpose to know, that the gentlemen who have chosen Mr. Boz as their exemplar, as far as their names are given, are Samuel Lover, T. Haynes Baayly, Douglas Jerrold, T. S. Coyne, Alexander Campbell, J. A. Wade, and Hamilton Reynolds. We hope that our readers will remember and shun them as we shall do. They are bad company and dull company; such as we may suppose assembled at the Boar's head in East-cheap when the Prince and old Jack were both absent, and with them all the spirit and all the wit of the club. Bardolph's red nose and the "Humors" of Corporal Nym make the whole entertainment.