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Tulrumble and Oliver Twise: Review of The Public Life of Mr. Tulrumble and Oliver Twist

N. Beverley Tucker

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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 TWINS AT RAMSGATE, embracing the last sketches of every day life, and every day people. By Boz. The first edition being entirely exhausted."
It is barely possible to conceive a more pleasantly reading miscellany—delightful from the abundance of its airy 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 enlightened, 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 chance of pleasing us, of this duty, and to secure ourselves 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.

As such, 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 rising population in alkali bases, 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 not exactly enough for the wants of the inhabitants, 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, —say, rushes into the very cellar and kitchen 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 unhandsome: 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 indispensable and veracious tradition of what Oliver Twist did to be damp, we distinctly state that it is unexceptionable.

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 Tulrumbule goes to the scaffold, and dresses up in it a fellow who gets drunk, and behaves like a drunkard, and so the pageant ends. Tulrumbule 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 the vulgar error at once, So, admitting Mudfog to be, 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 Tulrumbule goes to the scaffold, and dresses up in it a fellow who gets drunk, and behaves like a drunkard, and so the pageant ends. Tulrumbule 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.

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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 Eastville, 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 nescitur a socio. They, whose names are connected with his, will not be judged of by him. Mr. Bos 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 name 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. Bos as their exemplar, as far as their names are given, are Samuel Lover, T. Haynes Beasley, 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 Bott’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.