

JEROME K. JEROME

THE SURPRISE OF MR. MILBERRY

AND OTHER NOVELS



Classical literature (Капо)

Джером Джером

**The Surprise of Mr. Milberry
and other novels / Сюрприз
мистера Милберри и другие
новеллы. Книга для чтения
на английском языке**

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Комментарии и словарь Е. Г. Тигонен

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[There Is No Such Thing As Bad Weather]¹ (From Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow, 1886)

Things do go so contrary-like with me.² I wanted to hit upon an especially novel, out-of-the-way subject for one of these articles. "I will write one paper about something altogether new," I said to myself; "something that nobody else has ever written or talked about before; and then I can have it all my own way." And I went about for days, trying to think of something of this kind; and I couldn't. And Mrs. Cutting, our charwoman, came yesterday – I don't mind mentioning her name, because I know she will not see this book. She would not look at such a frivolous publication. She never reads anything but the Bible and *Lloyd's Weekly News*. All other literature she considers unnecessary and sinful.

She said: "Lor', sir, you do look worried."

I said: "Mrs. Cutting, I am trying to think of a subject the discussion of which will come upon the world in the nature of a startler – some subject upon which no previous human being has ever said a word – some subject that will attract by its novelty, invigorate by its surprising freshness."

She laughed and said I was a funny gentleman.

That's my luck again. When I make serious observations people chuckle; when I attempt a joke nobody sees it. I had a beautiful one last week. I thought it so good, and I worked it up and brought it in artfully at a dinner-party. I forget how exactly, but we had been talking about the attitude of Shakespeare toward the Reformation, and I said something and immediately added, "Ah, that reminds me; such a funny thing happened the other day in Whitechapel." "Oh," said they, "what was that?" "Oh, 'twas awfully funny," I replied, beginning to giggle myself; "it will make you roar;" and I told it them.

There was dead silence when I finished – it was one of those long jokes, too – and then, at last, somebody said: "And that was the joke?"

I assured them that it was, and they were very polite and took my word for it³. All but one old gentleman at the other end of the table, who wanted to know which was the joke – what he said to her or what she said to him; and we argued it out.

Some people are too much the other way. I knew a fellow once whose natural tendency to laugh at everything was so strong that if you wanted to talk seriously to him, you had to explain beforehand that what you were going to say would not be amusing. Unless you got him to clearly understand this, he would go off into fits of merriment over every word you uttered. I have known him on being asked the time stop short in the middle of the road, slap his leg, and burst into a roar of laughter. One never dared say anything really funny to that man. A good joke would have killed him on the spot.

In the present instance I vehemently repudiated the accusation of frivolity, and pressed Mrs. Cutting for practical ideas. She then became thoughtful and hazarded "samplers;" saying that she never heard them spoken much of now, but that they used to be all the rage⁴ when she was a girl.

I declined samplers and begged her to think again. She pondered a long while, with a tea-tray in her hands, and at last suggested the weather, which she was sure had been most trying of late.

And ever since that idiotic suggestion I have been unable to get the weather out of my thoughts or anything else in.

¹ Названия, не являющиеся авторскими, заключены в квадратные скобки.

² **Things do go so contrary-like with me.** – (разг.) Вечно у меня все наоборот.

³ **took my word for it** – (разг.) поверили мне на слово

⁴ **used to be all the rage** – (разг.) были популярны

It certainly is most wretched weather. At all events it is so now at the time I am writing, and if it isn't particularly unpleasant when I come to be read it soon will be.

It always is wretched weather according to us. The weather is like the government – always in the wrong⁵. In summer-time we say it is stifling; in winter that it is killing; in spring and autumn we find fault with it for being neither one thing nor the other and wish it would make up its mind. If it is fine we say the country is being ruined for want of rain; if it does rain we pray for fine weather. If December passes without snow, we indignantly demand to know what has become of our good old-fashioned winters, and talk as if we had been cheated out of something we had bought and paid for; and when it does snow, our language is a disgrace to a Christian nation. We shall never be content until each man makes his own weather and keeps it to himself.

If that cannot be arranged, we would rather do without it altogether.

Yet I think it is only to us in cities that all weather is so unwelcome. In her own home, the country, Nature is sweet in all her moods. What can be more beautiful than the snow, falling big with mystery in silent softness, decking the fields and trees with white as if for a fairy wedding! And how delightful is a walk when the frozen ground rings beneath our swinging tread – when our blood tingles in the rare keen air, and the sheep-dogs' distant bark and children's laughter peals faintly clear like Alpine bells across the open hills! And then skating! scudding with wings of steel across the swaying ice, making whirring music as we fly. And oh, how dainty is spring – Nature at sweet eighteen!

When the little hopeful leaves peep out so fresh and green, so pure and bright, like young lives pushing shyly out into the bustling world; when the fruit-tree blossoms, pink and white, like village maidens in their Sunday frocks, hide each whitewashed cottage in a cloud of fragile splendour; and the cuckoo's note upon the breeze is wafted through the woods! And summer, with its deep dark green and drowsy hum – when the rain-drops whisper solemn secrets to the listening leaves and the twilight lingers in the lanes! And autumn! ah, how sadly fair, with its golden glow and the dying grandeur of its tinted woods – its blood-red sunsets and its ghostly evening mists, with its busy murmur of reapers, and its laden orchards, and the calling of the gleaners, and the festivals of praise!

The very rain, and sleet, and hail seem only Nature's useful servants when found doing their simple duties in the country; and the East Wind himself is nothing worse than a boisterous friend when we meet him between the hedge-rows.

But in the city where the painted stucco blisters under the smoky sun, and the sooty rain brings slush and mud, and the snow lies piled in dirty heaps, and the chill blasts whistle down dingy streets and shriek round flaring gas-lit corners, no face of Nature charms us. Weather in towns is like a skylark in a counting-house – out of place and in the way⁶. Towns ought to be covered in, warmed by hot-water pipes, and lighted by electricity. The weather is a country lass and does not appear to advantage in town. We liked well enough to flirt with her in the hay-field, but she does not seem so fascinating when we meet her in Pall Mall. There is too much of her there. The frank, free laugh and hearty voice that sounded so pleasant in the dairy jars against the artificiality of town-bred life, and her ways become exceedingly trying.

Just lately she has been favouring us with almost incessant rain for about three weeks; and I am a damned damp, moist, unpleasant body, as Mr. Mantalini⁷ puts it.

Our next-door neighbour comes out in the back garden every now and then and says it's doing the country a world of good – not his coming out into the back garden, but the weather. He doesn't understand anything about it, but ever since he started a cucumber-frame last summer he has regarded himself in the light of an agriculturist, and talks in this absurd way with the idea of impressing the

⁵ **always in the wrong** – (разг.) всегда виновата

⁶ **out of place and in the way** – (разг.) неуместна и всем мешает

⁷ **Mr. Mantalini** – Манталини, персонаж романа Ч. Диккенса «Николас Никлби», малограмотный франт, бездельник, строящий из себя светского человека

rest of the terrace with the notion that he is a retired farmer. I can only hope that for this once he is correct, and that the weather really is doing good to something, because it is doing me a considerable amount of damage. It is spoiling both my clothes and my temper. The latter I can afford, as I have a good supply of it, but it wounds me to the quick⁸ to see my dear old hats and trousers sinking, prematurely worn and aged, beneath the cold world's blasts and snows.

There is my new spring suit, too. A beautiful suit it was, and now it is hanging up so bespattered with mud I can't bear to look at it.

That was Jim's fault, that was. I should never have gone out in it that night if it had not been for him. I was just trying it on when he came in. He threw up his arms with a wild yell the moment he caught sight of it, and exclaimed that he had "got 'em again!"

I said: "Does it fit all right behind?"

"Spiffin, old man," he replied. And then he wanted to know if I was coming out.

I said "no" at first, but he overruled me. He said that a man with a suit like that had no right to stop indoors. "Every citizen," said he, "owes a duty to the public. Each one should contribute to the general happiness as far as lies in his power. Come out and give the girls a treat."

Jim is slangy. I don't know where he picks it up. It certainly is not from me.

I said: "Do you think it will really please 'em?" He said it would be like a day in the country to them.

That decided me.⁹ It was a lovely evening and I went.

When I got home I undressed and rubbed myself down with whisky, put my feet in hot water and a mustard-plaster on my chest, had a basin of gruel and a glass of hot brandy-and-water, tallowed my nose, and went to bed.

These prompt and vigorous measures, aided by a naturally strong constitution, were the means of preserving my life; but as for the suit! Well, there, it isn't a suit; it's a splash-board.

And I did fancy that suit, too. But that's just the way. I never do get particularly fond of anything in this world but what something dreadful happens to it. I had a tame rat when I was a boy, and I loved that animal as only a boy would love an old water-rat; and one day it fell into a large dish of gooseberry-fool that was standing to cool in the kitchen, and nobody knew what had become of the poor creature until the second helping¹⁰.

I do hate wet weather in town. At least, it is not so much the wet as the mud that I object to. Somehow or other I seem to possess an irresistible alluring power over mud. I have only to show myself in the street on a muddy day to be half-smothered by it. It all comes of being so attractive¹¹, as the old lady said when she was struck by lightning. Other people can go out on dirty days and walk about for hours without getting a speck upon themselves; while if I go across the road I come back a perfect disgrace to be seen (as in my boyish days my poor dear mother tried often to tell me). If there were only one dab of mud to be found in the whole of London, I am convinced I should carry it off from all competitors.

I wish I could return the affection, but I fear I never shall be able to. I have a horror of what they call the "London particular." I feel miserable and muggy all through a dirty day, and it is quite a relief to pull one's clothes off and get into bed, out of the way of it all. Everything goes wrong in wet weather. I don't know how it is, but there always seem to me to be more people, and dogs, and perambulators, and cabs, and carts about in wet weather than at any other time, and they all get in your way more, and everybody is so disagreeable¹² – except myself – and it does make me so wild.

⁸ **it wounds me to the quick** – (разг.) уязвляет меня до глубины души

⁹ **That decided me.** – (разг.) И я решился.

¹⁰ **until the second helping** – (разг.) пока не попросили добавки

¹¹ **It all comes of being so attractive** – (разг.) А нечего было быть такой привлекательной (красота – это страшный магнит)

¹² **everybody is so disagreeable** – (разг.) у всех скандальное настроение

And then, too, somehow I always find myself carrying more things in wet weather than in dry; and when you have a bag, and three parcels, and a newspaper, and it suddenly comes on to rain, you can't open your umbrella.

Which reminds me of another phase of the weather that I can't bear, and that is April weather (so called because it always comes in May). Poets think it very nice. As it does not know its own mind five minutes together¹³, they liken it to a woman; and it is supposed to be very charming on that account. I don't appreciate it, myself. Such lightning-change business may be all very agreeable in a girl. It is no doubt highly delightful to have to do with a person who grins one moment about nothing at all, and snivels the next for precisely the same cause, and who then giggles, and then sulks, and who is rude, and affectionate, and bad-tempered, and jolly, and boisterous, and silent, and passionate, and cold, and stand-offish, and flopping, all in one minute (mind, I don't say this. It is those poets. And they are supposed to be connoisseurs of this sort of thing); but in the weather the disadvantages of the system are more apparent. A woman's tears do not make one wet, but the rain does; and her coldness does not lay the foundations of asthma and rheumatism, as the east wind is apt to. I can prepare for and put up with a regularly bad day, but these ha'porth-of-all-sorts kind¹⁴ of days do not suit me. It aggravates me to see a bright blue sky above me when I am walking along wet through, and there is something so exasperating about the way the sun comes out smiling after a drenching shower, and seems to say: "Lord love you, you don't mean to say you're wet? Well, I am surprised. Why, it was only my fun."

They don't give you time to open or shut your umbrella in an English April, especially if it is an "automaton" one – the umbrella, I mean, not the April.

I bought an "automaton" once in April, and I did have a time with it! I wanted an umbrella, and I went into a shop in the Strand and told them so, and they said:

"Yes, sir. What sort of an umbrella would you like?"

I said I should like one that would keep the rain off, and that would not allow itself to be left behind in a railway carriage.

"Try an 'automaton,'" said the shopman.

"What's an 'automaton'?" said I.

"Oh, it's a beautiful arrangement," replied the man, with a touch of enthusiasm. "It opens and shuts itself."

I bought one and found that he was quite correct. It did open and shut itself. I had no control over it whatever. When it began to rain, which it did that season every alternate five minutes, I used to try and get the machine to open, but it would not budge; and then I used to stand and struggle with the wretched thing, and shake it, and swear at it, while the rain poured down in torrents. Then the moment the rain ceased the absurd thing would go up suddenly with a jerk and would not come down again; and I had to walk about under a bright blue sky, with an umbrella over my head, wishing that it would come on to rain again, so that it might not seem that I was insane.

When it did shut it did so unexpectedly and knocked one's hat off.

I don't know why it should be so, but it is an undeniable fact that there is nothing makes a man look so supremely ridiculous as losing his hat. The feeling of helpless misery that shoots down one's back on suddenly becoming aware that one's head is bare is among the most bitter ills that flesh is heir to. And then there is the wild chase after it¹⁵, accompanied by an excitable small dog, who thinks it is a game, and in the course of which you are certain to upset three or four innocent children – to say nothing of their mothers – butt a fat old gentleman on to the top of a perambulator, and carom off a ladies' seminary into the arms of a wet sweep.

¹³ it does not know its own mind five minutes together – (разг.) (погода) и сама не знает, какой будет через пять минут

¹⁴ ha'porth-of-all-sorts kind – (метеорол.) ветер средней силы будет дуть с разных направлений

¹⁵ then there is the wild chase after it – (ирон.) затем следует бешеная погоня за ней

After this, the idiotic hilarity of the spectators and the disreputable appearance of the hat when recovered appear but of minor importance.

Altogether, what between March winds, April showers, and the entire absence of May flowers, spring is not a success in cities¹⁶. It is all very well in the country, as I have said, but in towns whose population is anything over ten thousand it most certainly ought to be abolished. In the world's grim workshops it is like the children – out of place. Neither shows to advantage amid the dust and din. It seems so sad to see the little dirt-grimed brats try to play in the noisy courts and muddy streets. Poor little uncared-for, unwanted human atoms, they are not children. Children are bright-eyed, chubby, and shy. These are dingy, screeching elves, their tiny faces seared and withered, their baby laughter cracked and hoarse.

The spring of life and the spring of the year were alike meant to be cradled in the green lap of nature. To us in the town spring brings but its cold winds and drizzling rains. We must seek it among the leafless woods and the brambly lanes, on the heathy moors and the great still hills, if we want to feel its joyous breath and hear its silent voices. There is a glorious freshness in the spring there. The scurrying clouds, the open bleakness, the rushing wind, and the clear bright air thrill one with vague energies and hopes. Life, like the landscape around us, seems bigger, and wider, and freer – a rainbow road leading to unknown ends. Through the silvery rents that bar the sky we seem to catch a glimpse of the great hope and grandeur that lies around this little throbbing world, and a breath of its scent is wafted us on the wings of the wild March wind.

Strange thoughts we do not understand are stirring in our hearts. Voices are calling us to some great effort, to some mighty work. But we do not comprehend their meaning yet, and the hidden echoes within us that would reply are struggling, inarticulate and dumb.

We stretch our hands like children to the light, seeking to grasp we know not what¹⁷. Our thoughts, like the boys' thoughts in the Danish song, are very long, long thoughts, and very vague; we cannot see their end.

It must be so. All thoughts that peer outside this narrow world cannot be else than dim and shapeless. The thoughts that we can clearly grasp are very little thoughts – that two and two make four – that when we are hungry it is pleasant to eat – that honesty is the best policy; all greater thoughts are undefined and vast to our poor childish brains. We see but dimly through the mists that roll around our time-girt isle of life, and only hear the distant surging of the great sea beyond.

¹⁶ **spring is not a success in cities** – (разг.) весна не приводит горожан в восторг

¹⁷ **seeking to grasp we know not what** – (уст.) стараясь ухватить неизвестно что

The Ghost of the Blue Chamber (My Uncle's Story) (From Told After Supper, 1891)

"I don't want to make you fellows nervous," began my uncle in a peculiarly impressive, not to say blood-curdling, tone of voice, "and if you would rather that I did not mention it, I won't; but, as a matter of fact, this very house, in which we are now sitting, is haunted."

"You don't say that!" exclaimed Mr. Coombes.

"What's the use of your saying I don't say it when I have just said it?" retorted my uncle somewhat pettishly. "You do talk so foolishly. I tell you the house is haunted. Regularly on Christmas Eve the Blue Chamber [they called the room next to the nursery the 'blue chamber,' at my uncle's, most of the toilet service being of that shade] is haunted by the ghost of a sinful man – a man who once killed a Christmas wait with a lump of coal."

"How did he do it?" asked Mr. Coombes, with eager anxiousness. "Was it difficult?"

"I do not know how he did it," replied my uncle; "he did not explain the process. The wait had taken up a position just inside the front gate, and was singing a ballad. It is presumed that, when he opened his mouth for B flat, the lump of coal was thrown by the sinful man from one of the windows, and that it went down the wait's throat and choked him."

"You want to be a good shot, but it is certainly worth trying¹⁸," murmured Mr. Coombes thoughtfully.

"But that was not his only crime, alas!" added my uncle. "Prior to that he had killed a solo cornet-player."

"No! Is that really a fact?" exclaimed Mr. Coombes.

"Of course it's a fact," answered my uncle testily; "at all events, as much a fact as you can expect to get in a case of this sort."

"How very captious you are this evening. The circumstantial evidence was overwhelming. The poor fellow, the cornet-player, had been in the neighbourhood barely a month. Old Mr. Bishop, who kept the 'Jolly Sand Boys' at the time, and from whom I had the story, said he had never known a more hard-working and energetic solo cornet-player. He, the cornet-player, only knew two tunes, but Mr. Bishop said that the man could not have played with more vigour, or for more hours in a day, if he had known forty. The two tunes he did play were "Annie Laurie" and "Home, Sweet Home"; and as regarded his performance of the former melody, Mr. Bishop said that a mere child could have told what it was meant for."

"This musician – this poor, friendless artist used to come regularly and play in this street just opposite for two hours every evening. One evening he was seen, evidently in response to an invitation, going into this very house, BUT WAS NEVER SEEN COMING OUT OF IT!¹⁹"

"Did the townsfolk try offering any reward for his recovery?" asked Mr. Coombes.

"Not a ha'penny," replied my uncle.

"Another summer," continued my uncle, "a German band visited here, intending – so they announced on their arrival – to stay till the autumn."

"On the second day from their arrival, the whole company, as fine and healthy a body of men as one could wish to see, were invited to dinner by this sinful man, and, after spending the whole of the next twenty-four hours in bed, left the town a broken and dyspeptic crew; the parish doctor,

¹⁸ but it is certainly worth trying – (разг.) но все-таки попробовать стоит

¹⁹ but was never seen coming out of it – (разг.) но никто не видел, как он уходит

who had attended them, giving it as his opinion that it was doubtful if they would, any of them, be fit to play an air again²⁰.”

“You – you don’t know the recipe, do you?” asked Mr. Coombes.

“Unfortunately I do not,” replied my uncle; “but the chief ingredient was said to have been railway refreshment-room pork-pie.

“I forget the man’s other crimes,” my uncle went on; “I used to know them all at one time, but my memory is not what it was²¹. I do not, however, believe I am doing his memory an injustice in believing that he was not entirely unconnected with the death, and subsequent burial, of a gentleman who used to play the harp with his toes; and that neither was he altogether irresponsible for the lonely grave of an unknown stranger who had once visited the neighbourhood, an Italian peasant lad, a performer upon the barrel-organ.

“Every Christmas Eve,” said my uncle, cleaving with low impressive tones the strange awed silence that, like a shadow, seemed to have slowly stolen into and settled down upon the room, “the ghost of this sinful man haunts the Blue Chamber, in this very house. There, from midnight until cock-crow, amid wild muffled shrieks and groans and mocking laughter and the ghostly sound of horrid blows, it does fierce phantom fight with the spirits of the solo cornet-player and the murdered wait, assisted at intervals, by the shades of the German band; while the ghost of the strangled harpist plays mad ghostly melodies with ghostly toes on the ghost of a broken harp.”

Uncle said the Blue Chamber was comparatively useless as a sleeping-apartment on Christmas Eve.

“Hark!” said uncle, raising a warning hand towards the ceiling, while we held our breath, and listened; “Hark! I believe they are at it now – in the BLUE CHAMBER!”

I rose up, and said that I would sleep in the Blue Chamber.

Before I tell you my own story, however – the story of what happened in the Blue Chamber – I would wish to preface it with —

²⁰ **be fit to play an air again** – (разг.) сможет сыграть хоть что-нибудь (какой-нибудь мотивчик)

²¹ **my memory is not what it was** – (разг.) память у меня уже не та

A Personal Explanation

I feel a good deal of hesitation about telling you this story of my own. You see it is not a story like the other stories that I have been telling you, or rather that Teddy Biffles, Mr. Coombes, and my uncle have been telling you: it is a true story. It is not a story told by a person sitting round a fire on Christmas Eve, drinking whisky punch: it is a record of events that actually happened.

Indeed, it is not a 'story' at all, in the commonly accepted meaning of the word: it is a report. It is, I feel, almost out of place in a book of this kind. It is more suitable to a biography, or an English history.

There is another thing that makes it difficult for me to tell you this story, and that is, that it is all about myself. In telling you this story, I shall have to keep on talking about myself; and talking about ourselves is what we modern-day authors have a strong objection to doing. If we literary men of the new school have one praiseworthy yearning more ever present to our minds than another it is the yearning never to appear in the slightest degree egotistical.

I myself, so I am told, carry this coyness – this shrinking reticence concerning anything connected with my own personality, almost too far; and people grumble at me because of it. People come to me and say:

"Well, now, why don't you talk about yourself a bit? That's what we want to read about. Tell us something about yourself."

But I have always replied, "No." It is not that I do not think the subject an interesting one. I cannot myself conceive of any topic more likely to prove fascinating to the world as a whole, or at all events to the cultured portion of it. But I will not do it, on principle. It is inartistic, and it sets a bad example to the younger men. Other writers (a few of them) do it, I know; but I will not – not as a rule.

Under ordinary circumstances, therefore, I should not tell you this story at all. I should say to myself, "No! It is a good story, it is a moral story, it is a strange, weird, enthralling sort of a story; and the public, I know, would like to hear it; and I should like to tell it to them; but it is all about myself – about what I said, and what I saw, and what I did, and I cannot do it. My retiring, anti-egotistical nature will not permit me to talk in this way about myself."

But the circumstances surrounding this story are not ordinary, and there are reasons prompting me, in spite of my modesty, to rather welcome the opportunity of relating it.

As I stated at the beginning, there has been unpleasantness in our family over this party of ours, and, as regards myself in particular²², and my share in the events I am now about to set forth, gross injustice has been done me.

As a means of replacing my character in its proper light – of dispelling the clouds of calumny and misconception with which it has been darkened, I feel that my best course is to give a simple, dignified narration of the plain facts, and allow the unprejudiced to judge for themselves. My chief object, I candidly confess, is to clear myself from unjust aspersion. Spurred by this motive – and I think it is an honourable and a right motive – I find I am enabled to overcome my usual repugnance to talking about myself, and can thus tell —

²² as regards myself in particular – (разг.) что же касается в частности меня

My Own Story

As soon as my uncle had finished his story, I, as I have already told you, rose up and said that *I* would sleep in the Blue Chamber that very night.

“Never!²³” cried my uncle, springing up. “You shall not put yourself in this deadly peril. Besides, the bed is not made.”

“Never mind the bed,” I replied. “I have lived in furnished apartments for gentlemen, and have been accustomed to sleep on beds that have never been made from one year’s end to the other. Do not thwart me in my resolve. I am young, and have had a clear conscience now for over a month. The spirits will not harm me. I may even do them some little good, and induce them to be quiet and go away. Besides, I should like to see the show.”

Saying which, I sat down again. (How Mr. Coombes came to be in my chair, instead of at the other side of the room, where he had been all the evening; and why he never offered to apologise when I sat right down on top of him; and why young Biffles should have tried to palm himself off upon me as my Uncle John, and induced me, under that erroneous impression, to shake him by the hand for nearly three minutes, and tell him that I had always regarded him as father, – are matters that, to this day, I have never been able to fully understand.)

They tried to dissuade me from what they termed my foolhardy enterprise²⁴, but I remained firm, and claimed my privilege. I was “the guest.” “The guest” always sleeps in the haunted chamber on Christmas Eve; it is his perquisite.

They said that if I put it on that footing, they had, of course, no answer; and they lighted a candle for me, and accompanied me upstairs in a body²⁵.

Whether elevated by the feeling that I was doing a noble action, or animated by a mere general consciousness of rectitude, is not for me to say, but I went upstairs that night with remarkable buoyancy. It was as much as I could do to stop at the landing when I came to it; I felt I wanted to go on up to the roof. But, with the help of the banisters, I restrained my ambition, wished them all good-night, and went in and shut the door.

Things began to go wrong with me from the very first. The candle tumbled out of the candlestick before my hand was off the lock. It kept on tumbling out of the candlestick, and every time I picked it up and put it in, it tumbled out again: I never saw such a slippery candle. I gave up attempting to use the candlestick at last, and carried the candle about in my hand; and, even then, it would not keep upright. So I got wild and threw it out of window, and undressed and went to bed in the dark.

I did not go to sleep, – I did not feel sleepy at all, – I lay on my back, looking up at the ceiling, and thinking of things. I wish I could remember some of the ideas that came to me as I lay there, because they were so amusing. I laughed at them myself till the bed shook.

I had been lying like this for half an hour or so, and had forgotten all about the ghost, when, on casually casting my eyes round the room, I noticed for the first time a singularly contented-looking phantom, sitting in the easy-chair by the fire, smoking the ghost of a long clay pipe.

I fancied for the moment, as most people would under similar circumstances, that I must be dreaming. I sat up, and rubbed my eyes.

No! It was a ghost, clear enough. I could see the back of the chair through his body. He looked over towards me, took the shadowy pipe from his lips, and nodded.

The most surprising part of the whole thing to me was that I did not feel in the least alarmed. If anything, I was rather pleased to see him. It was company.

²³ **Never!** – (разг.) Ни за что!

²⁴ **foolhardy enterprise** – (разг.) дурацкая затея

²⁵ **in a body** – (разг.) всей толпой

I said, "Good evening. It's been a cold day!"

He said he had not noticed it himself, but dared say I was right.

We remained silent for a few seconds, and then, wishing to put it pleasantly²⁶, I said, "I believe I have the honour of addressing the ghost of the gentleman who had the accident with the wait?"

He smiled, and said it was very good of me to remember it. One wait was not much to boast of, but still, every little helped²⁷.

I was somewhat staggered at his answer. I had expected a groan of remorse. The ghost appeared, on the contrary, to be rather conceited over the business. I thought that, as he had taken my reference to the wait so quietly, perhaps he would not be offended if I questioned him about the organ-grinder. I felt curious about that poor boy.

"Is it true," I asked, "that you had a hand in the death of that Italian peasant lad who came to the town once with a barrel-organ that played nothing but Scotch airs?"

He quite fired up. "Had a hand in it!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Who has dared to pretend that he assisted me? I murdered the youth myself. Nobody helped me. Alone I did it. Show me the man who says I didn't."

I calmed him. I assured him that I had never, in my own mind, doubted that he was the real and only assassin, and I went on and asked him what he had done with the body of the cornet-player he had killed.

He said, "To which one may you be alluding?²⁸"

"Oh, were there any more then?" I inquired.

He smiled, and gave a little cough. He said he did not like to appear to be boasting, but that, counting trombones, there were seven.

"Dear me!" I replied, "you must have had quite a busy time of it, one way and another."

He said that perhaps he ought not to be the one to say so, but that really, speaking of ordinary middle-society, he thought there were few ghosts who could look back upon a life of more sustained usefulness.

He puffed away in silence for a few seconds, while I sat watching him. I had never seen a ghost smoking a pipe before, that I could remember, and it interested me.

I asked him what tobacco he used, and he replied, "The ghost of cut cavendish, as a rule."

He explained that the ghost of all the tobacco that a man smoked in life belonged to him when he became dead. He said he himself had smoked a good deal of cut cavendish when he was alive, so that he was well supplied with the ghost of it now.

I observed that it was a useful thing to know that, and I made up my mind to smoke as much tobacco as ever I could before I died.

I thought I might as well start at once, so I said I would join him in a pipe²⁹, and he said, "Do, old man"; and I reached over and got out the necessary paraphernalia from my coat pocket and lit up.

We grew quite chummy after that, and he told me all his crimes. He said he had lived next door once to a young lady who was learning to play the guitar, while a gentleman who practised on the bass-viol lived opposite. And he, with fiendish cunning, had introduced these two unsuspecting young people to one another, and had persuaded them to elope with each other against their parents' wishes, and take their musical instruments with them; and they had done so, and, before the honeymoon was over, SHE had broken his head with the bass-viol, and HE had tried to cram the guitar down her throat, and had injured her for life.

²⁶ **wishing to put it pleasantly** – (разг.) желая сказать ему что-нибудь приятное

²⁷ **every little helped** – (разг.) с чего-то же надо начинать

²⁸ **To which one may you be alluding?** – (уст.) О ком именно вы спрашиваете? (Кого конкретно вы имеете в виду?)

²⁹ **I would join him in a pipe** – (разг.) я тоже, пожалуй, закурю за компанию

My friend said he used to lure muffin-men into the passage and then stuff them with their own wares till they burst and died. He said he had quieted eighteen that way.

Young men and women who recited long and dreary poems at evening parties, and callow youths who walked about the streets late at night, playing concertinas, he used to get together and poison in batches of ten, so as to save expense³⁰; and park orators and temperance lecturers he used to shut up six in a small room with a glass of water and a collection-box apiece, and let them talk each other to death.

It did one good to listen to him.

I asked him when he expected the other ghosts – the ghosts of the wait and the cornet-player, and the German band that Uncle John had mentioned. He smiled, and said they would never come again, any of them.

I said, “Why; isn’t it true, then, that they meet you here every Christmas Eve for a row?”

He replied that it WAS true. Every Christmas Eve, for twenty-five years, had he and they fought in that room; but they would never trouble him nor anybody else again. One by one, had he laid them out, spoilt, and utterly useless for all haunting purposes. He had finished off the last German-band ghost that very evening, just before I came upstairs, and had thrown what was left of it out through the slit between the window-sashes. He said it would never be worth calling a ghost again.

“I suppose you will still come yourself, as usual?” I said. “They would be sorry to miss you, I know.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” he replied; “there’s nothing much to come for now. Unless,” he added kindly, “YOU are going to be here. I’ll come if you will sleep here next Christmas Eve.”

“I have taken a liking to you,” he continued; “you don’t fly off, screeching, when you see a party, and your hair doesn’t stand on end³¹. You’ve no idea,” he said, “how sick I am of seeing people’s hair standing on end.”

He said it irritated him.

Just then a slight noise reached us from the yard below, and he started and turned deathly black.

“You are ill,” I cried, springing towards him; “tell me the best thing to do for you. Shall I drink some brandy, and give you the ghost of it?”

He remained silent, listening intently for a moment, and then he gave a sigh of relief, and the shade came back to his cheek.

“It’s all right,” he murmured; “I was afraid it was the cock.”

“Oh, it’s too early for that,” I said. “Why, it’s only the middle of the night.”

“Oh, that doesn’t make any difference to those cursed chickens,” he replied bitterly. “They would just as soon crow in the middle of the night as at any other time – sooner, if they thought it would spoil a chap’s evening out. I believe they do it on purpose.”

He said a friend of his, the ghost of a man who had killed a water-rate collector³², used to haunt a house in Long Acre, where they kept fowls in the cellar, and every time a policeman went by and flashed his bull’s-eye down the grating, the old cock there would fancy it was the sun, and start crowing like mad; when, of course, the poor ghost had to dissolve, and it would, in consequence, get back home sometimes as early as one o’clock in the morning, swearing fearfully because it had only been out for an hour.

I agreed that it seemed very unfair.

“Oh, it’s an absurd arrangement altogether,” he continued, quite angrily. “I can’t imagine what our old man could have been thinking of when he made it. As I have said to him, over and over again,

³⁰ so as to save expense – (разг.) так выходило дешевле

³¹ your hair doesn’t stand on end – (разг.) у вас волосы не встают дыбом

³² a water-rate collector – (разг.) служащий, снимающий показания счетчиков воды

‘Have a fixed time, and let everybody stick to it – say four o’clock in summer, and six in winter. Then one would know what one was about.’”

“How do you manage when there isn’t any cock handy?” I inquired.

He was on the point of replying, when again he started and listened. This time I distinctly heard Mr. Bowles’s cock, next door, crow twice.

“There you are,” he said, rising and reaching for his hat; “that’s the sort of thing we have to put up with³³. What IS the time?”

I looked at my watch, and found it was half-past three.

“I thought as much,” he muttered. “I’ll wring that blessed bird’s neck if I get hold of it.” And he prepared to go.

“If you can wait half a minute,” I said, getting out of bed, “I’ll go a bit of the way with you.”

“It’s very good of you,” he rejoined, pausing, “but it seems unkind to drag you out.”

“Not at all,” I replied; “I shall like a walk.” And I partially dressed myself, and took my umbrella; and he put his arm through mine, and we went out together.

Just by the gate we met Jones, one of the local constables.

“Good-night, Jones,” I said (I always feel affable at Christmas-time).

“Good-night, sir,” answered the man a little gruffly, I thought. “May I ask what you’re a-doing of?”

“Oh, it’s all right,” I responded, with a wave of my umbrella; “I’m just seeing my friend part of the way home.”

He said, “What friend?”

“Oh, ah, of course,” I laughed; “I forgot. He’s invisible to you. He is the ghost of the gentleman that killed the wait. I’m just going to the corner with him.”

“Ah, I don’t think I would, if I was you, sir,” said Jones severely. “If you take my advice, you’ll say good-bye to your friend here, and go back indoors. Perhaps you are not aware that you are walking about with nothing on but a night-shirt and a pair of boots and an opera-hat. Where’s your trousers?”

I did not like the man’s manner at all. I said, “Jones! I don’t wish to have to report you, but it seems to me you’ve been drinking. My trousers are where a man’s trousers ought to be – on his legs. I distinctly remember putting them on.”

“Well, you haven’t got them on now,” he retorted.

“I beg your pardon,” I replied. “I tell you I have; I think I ought to know³⁴.”

“I think so, too,” he answered, “but you evidently don’t. Now you come along indoors with me, and don’t let’s have any more of it.”

Uncle John came to the door at this point, having been awaked, I suppose, by the altercation; and, at the same moment, Aunt Maria appeared at the window in her nightcap.

I explained the constable’s mistake to them, treating the matter as lightly as I could, so as not to get the man into trouble, and I turned for confirmation to the ghost.

He was gone! He had left me without a word – without even saying good-bye!

It struck me as so unkind, his having gone off in that way, that I burst into tears; and Uncle John came out, and led me back into the house.

On reaching my room, I discovered that Jones was right. I had not put on my trousers, after all. They were still hanging over the bed-rail. I suppose, in my anxiety not to keep the ghost waiting, I must have forgotten them.

Such are the plain facts of the case, out of which it must, doubtless, to the healthy, charitable mind appear impossible that calumny could spring.

But it has.

³³ **that’s the sort of thing we have to put up with** – (разг.) вот с чем приходится мириться

³⁴ **I think I ought to know** – (разг.) думаю, мне виднее ³⁸

Persons – I say ‘persons’ – have professed themselves unable to understand the simple circumstances herein narrated, except in the light of explanations at once misleading and insulting. Slurs have been cast and aspersions made on me by those of my own flesh and blood.

But I bear no ill-feeling. I merely, as I have said, set forth this statement for the purpose of clearing my character from injurious suspicion³⁵.

³⁵ **clearing my character from injurious suspicion** – (разг.) очистить мое имя от незаслуженных обвинений

Evergreens (Excerpt) (From Diary of a Pilgrimage and Other Stories, 1891)

What a splendid old dog the bull-dog is! so grim, so silent, so stanch; so terrible, when he has got his idea of his duty clear before him; so absurdly meek, when it is only himself that is concerned.

He is the gentlest, too, and the most lovable of all dogs. He does not look it. The sweetness of his disposition would not strike the casual observer at first glance.³⁶ He resembles the gentleman spoken of in the oft-quoted stanza:

'E's all right when yer knows 'im.
But yer've got to know 'im fust.

The first time I ever met a bull-dog – to speak to, that is – was many years ago. We were lodging down in the country, an orphan friend of mine named George, and myself, and one night, coming home late from some dissolving views we found the family had gone to bed. They had left a light in our room, however, and we went in and sat down, and began to take off our boots.

And then, for the first time, we noticed on the hearthrug a bull-dog. A dog with a more thoughtfully ferocious expression – a dog with, apparently, a heart more dead to all ennobling and civilizing sentiments – I have never seen. As George said, he looked more like some heathen idol than a happy English dog.

He appeared to have been waiting for us; and he rose up and greeted us with a ghastly grin, and got between us and the door.

We smiled at him – a sickly, propitiatory smile. We said, “Good dog – poor fellow!” and we asked him, in tones implying that the question could admit of no negative³⁷, if he was not a “nice old chap.” We did not really think so. We had our own private opinion concerning him, and it was unfavourable. But we did not express it. We would not have hurt his feelings for the world. He was a visitor, our guest, so to speak – and, as well-brought-up young men, we felt that the right thing to do was for us to prevent his gaining any hint that we were not glad to see him, and to make him feel as little as possible the awkwardness of his position.

I think we succeeded. He was singularly unembarrassed, and far more at his ease than even we were. He took but little notice of our flattering remarks, but was much drawn toward George's legs. George used to be, I remember, rather proud of his legs. I could never see enough in them myself to excuse George's vanity; indeed, they always struck me as lumpy. It is only fair to acknowledge, however, that they quite fascinated that bull-dog. He walked over and criticized them with the air of a long-baffled connoisseur³⁸ who had at last found his ideal. At the termination of his inspection he distinctly smiled.

George, who at that time was modest and bashful, blushed and drew them up on to the chair. On the dog's displaying a desire to follow them, George moved up on to the table, and squatted there in the middle, nursing his knees. George's legs being lost to him, the dog appeared inclined to console himself with mine. I went and sat beside George on the table.

³⁶ **The sweetness of his disposition would not strike the casual observer at first glance.** – (уст.) Его благорасположенность не бросается в глаза с первого взгляда.

³⁷ **in tones implying that the question could admit of no negative** – (ирон.) тоном, не допускающим отрицательного ответа

³⁸ **with the air of a long-baffled connoisseur** – (разг.) с видом знатока

Sitting with your feet drawn up in front of you, on a small and rickety one-legged table, is a most trying exercise, especially if you are not used to it³⁹.

George and I both felt our position keenly. We did not like to call out for help, and bring the family down. We were proud young men, and we feared lest, to the unsympathetic eye of the comparative stranger, the spectacle we should present might not prove imposing.

We sat on in silence for about half an hour, the dog keeping a reproachful eye upon us from the nearest chair, and displaying elephantine delight whenever we made any movement suggestive of climbing down.

At the end of the half hour we discussed the advisability of “chancing it,” but decided not to. “We should never,” George said, “confound foolhardiness with courage⁴⁰.”

“Courage,” he continued – George had quite a gift for maxims – “courage is the wisdom of manhood; foolhardiness, the folly of youth.”

He said that to get down from the table while that dog remained in the room, would clearly prove us to be possessed of the latter quality; so we restrained ourselves, and sat on.

We sat on for over an hour, by which time, having both grown careless of life and indifferent to the voice of Wisdom, we did “chance it;” and throwing the table-cloth over our would-be murderer, charged for the door and got out.

The next morning we complained to our landlady of her carelessness in leaving wild beasts about the place, and we gave her a brief if not exactly truthful, history of the business.

Instead of the tender womanly sympathy we had expected, the old lady sat down in the easy chair and burst out laughing.

“What! old Boozer,” she exclaimed, “you was afraid of old Boozer! Why, bless you, he wouldn’t hurt a worm⁴¹! He ain’t got a tooth in his head, he ain’t; we has to feed him with a spoon; and I’m sure the way the cat chivies him about must be enough to make his life a burden to him. I expect he wanted you to nurse him; he’s used to being nursed.”

And that was the brute that had kept us sitting on a table, with our boots off, for over an hour on a chilly night!

Another bull-dog exhibition that occurs to me was one given by my uncle. He had had a bull-dog – a young one – given to him by a friend. It was a grand dog, so his friend had told him; all it wanted was training – it had not been properly trained. My uncle did not profess to know much about the training of bull-dogs; but it seemed a simple enough matter, so he thanked the man, and took his prize home at the end of a rope.

“Have we got to live in the house with *this*?” asked my aunt, indignantly, coming into the room about an hour after the dog’s advent, followed by the quadruped himself, wearing an idiotically self-satisfied air.

“That!” exclaimed my uncle, in astonishment; “why, it’s a splendid dog. His father was honourably mentioned only last year at the Aquarium.”

“Ah, well, all I can say is, that his son isn’t going the way to get honourably mentioned in this neighbourhood,” replied my aunt, with bitterness; “he’s just finished killing poor Mrs. McSlanger’s cat, if you want to know what he has been doing. And a pretty row there’ll be about it, too!”

“Can’t we hush it up?⁴²” said my uncle.

“Hush it up?” retorted my aunt. “If you’d heard the row, you wouldn’t sit there and talk like a fool. And if you’ll take my advice,” added my aunt, “you’ll set to work on this ‘training,’ or whatever it is, that has got to be done to the dog, before any human life is lost.”

³⁹ especially if you are not used to it – (разг.) особенно с непривычки

⁴⁰ confound foolhardiness with courage – (разг.) путать безрассудство с храбростью

⁴¹ he wouldn’t hurt a worm – (разг.) да он и мухи не обидит

⁴² Can’t we hush it up? – (разг.) А мы не можем это как-нибудь замять?

My uncle was too busy to devote any time to the dog for the next day or so, and all that could be done was to keep the animal carefully confined to the house⁴³.

And a nice time we had with him! It was not that the animal was bad-hearted. He meant well – he tried to do his duty. What was wrong with him was that he was too hard-working. He wanted to do too much. He started with an exaggerated and totally erroneous notion of his duties and responsibilities. His idea was that he had been brought into the house for the purpose of preventing any living human soul from coming near it and of preventing any person who might by chance have managed to slip in from ever again leaving it.

We endeavoured to induce him to take a less exalted view of his position, but in vain. That was the conception he had formed in his own mind concerning his earthly task, and that conception he insisted on living up to with⁴⁴, what appeared to us to be, unnecessary conscientiousness.

He so effectually frightened away all the trades people, that they at last refused to enter the gate. All that they would do was to bring their goods and drop them over the fence into the front garden, from where we had to go and fetch them as we wanted them.

“I wish you’d run into the garden,” my aunt would say to me – I was stopping with them at the time – “and see if you can find any sugar; I think there’s some under the big rose-bush. If not, you’d better go to Jones’ and order some.”

And on the cook’s inquiring what she should get ready for lunch, my aunt would say:

“Well, I’m sure, Jane, I hardly know. What have we? Are there any chops in the garden, or was it a bit of steak that I noticed on the lawn?”

On the second afternoon the plumbers came to do a little job to the kitchen boiler. The dog, being engaged at the time in the front of the house, driving away the postman, did not notice their arrival. He was broken-hearted at finding them there when he got downstairs, and evidently blamed himself most bitterly. Still, there they were, all owing to his carelessness, and the only thing to be done now was to see that they did not escape.

There were three plumbers (it always takes three plumbers to do a job; the first man comes on ahead to tell you that the second man will be there soon, the second man comes to say that he can’t stop, and the third man follows to ask if the first man has been there); and that faithful, dumb animal kept them pinned up in the kitchen – fancy wanting to keep plumbers in a house longer than is absolutely necessary! – for five hours, until my uncle came home; and the bill ran: “Self and two men engaged six hours, repairing boiler-tap, 18s.⁴⁵; material, 2d.⁴⁶; total 18s. 2d.”

He took a dislike to the cook from the very first⁴⁷. We did not blame him for this. She was a disagreeable old woman, and we did not think much of her ourselves. But when it came to keeping her out of the kitchen, so that she could not do her work, and my aunt and uncle had to cook the dinner themselves, assisted by the housemaid – a willing-enough girl, but necessarily inexperienced – we felt that the woman was being subject to persecution.

My uncle, after this, decided that the dog’s training must be no longer neglected. The man next door but one always talked as if he knew a lot about sporting matters, and to him my uncle went for advice as to how to set about it.

“Oh, yes,” said the man, cheerfully, “very simple thing, training a bull-dog. Wants patience, that’s all.”

“Oh, that will be all right,” said my uncle; “it can’t want much more than living in the same house with him before he’s trained does. How do you start?”

⁴³ to keep the animal carefully confined to the house – (уст.) держать зверя взаперти

⁴⁴ that conception he insisted on living up to with – (разг.) он собирался отстаивать эти свои жизненные принципы

⁴⁵ s. – сокр. от shillings

⁴⁶ d. – сокр. от dēnārius, penny

⁴⁷ from the very first – (разг.) с первого же взгляда

“Well, I’ll tell you,” said next-door-but-one. “You take him up into a room where there’s not much furniture, and you shut the door and bolt it.”

“I see,” said my uncle.

“Then you place him on the floor in the middle of the room, and you go down on your knees in front of him, and begin to irritate him.”

“Oh!”

“Yes – and you go on irritating him until you have made him quite savage⁴⁸.”

“Which, from what I know of the dog, won’t take long,” observed my uncle thoughtfully.

“So much the better. The moment he gets savage he will fly at you.”

My uncle agreed that the idea seemed plausible.

“He will fly at your throat,” continued the next-door-but-one man, “and this is where you will have to be careful. As he springs toward you, and *before* he gets hold of you, you must hit him a fair straight blow on his nose, and knock him down.”

“Yes, I see what you mean.”

“Quite so – well, the moment you have knocked him down, he will jump up and go for you again. You must knock him down again; and you must keep on doing this, until the dog is thoroughly cowed and exhausted. Once he is thoroughly cowed, the thing’s done – dog’s as gentle as a lamb after that.”

“Oh!” says my uncle, rising from his chair, “you think that a good way, do you?”

“Certainly,” replied the next-door-but-one man; “it never fails⁴⁹.”

“Oh! I wasn’t doubting it,” said my uncle; “only it’s just occurred to me that as you understand the knack of these things, perhaps *you’d* like to come in and try *your* hand on the dog? We can give you a room quite to yourselves; and I’ll undertake that nobody comes near to interfere with you. And if – if,” continued my uncle, with that kindly thoughtfulness which ever distinguished his treatment of others, “*if*, by any chance, you should miss hitting the dog at the proper critical moment, or, if *you* should get cowed and exhausted first, instead of the dog – why, I shall only be too pleased to take the whole burden of the funeral expenses on my own shoulders; and I hope you know me well enough to feel sure that the arrangements will be tasteful, and, at the same time, unostentatious!”

And out my uncle walked.

We next consulted the butcher, who agreed that the prize-ring method was absurd, especially when recommended to a short-winded, elderly family man, and who recommended, instead, plenty of outdoor exercise for the dog, under my uncle’s strict supervision and control.

“Get a fairly long chain for him,” said the butcher, “and take him out for a good stiff run every evening. Never let him get away from you; make him mind you, and bring him home always thoroughly exhausted. You stick to that for a month or two, regular, and you’ll have him like a little child.”

“Um! – seems to me that I’m going to get more training over his job than anybody else,” muttered my uncle, as he thanked the man and left the shop; “but I suppose it’s got to be done. Wish I’d never had the d – dog now!⁵⁰”

So, religiously, every evening, my uncle would fasten a long chain to that poor dog, and drag him away from his happy home with the idea of exhausting him; and the dog would come back as fresh as paint, my uncle behind him, panting and clamoring for brandy.

My uncle said he should never have dreamed there could have been such stirring times in this prosaic nineteenth century as he had, training that dog.

⁴⁸ **until you have made him quite savage** – (разг.) пока вы не доведете его до белого каления

⁴⁹ **it never fails** – (разг.) это всегда сбывается

⁵⁰ **Wish I’d never had the d – dog now!** – (разг.) Черт меня дернул связаться с этакой скотиной!

Oh, the wild, wild scamperings over the breezy common – the dog trying to catch a swallow, and my uncle, unable to hold him back, following at the other end of the chain!

Oh, the merry frolics in the fields, when the dog wanted to kill a cow, and the cow wanted to kill the dog, and they each dodged round my uncle, trying to do it!

And, oh, the pleasant chats with the old ladies when the dog wound the chain into a knot around their legs, and upset them, and my uncle had to sit down in the road beside them, and untie them before they could get up again!

But a crisis came at last. It was a Saturday afternoon – uncle being exercised by dog in the usual way – nervous children playing in road, see dog, scream, and run – playful young dog thinks it a game, jerks chain out of uncle's grasp, and flies after them – uncle flies after dog, calling it names – fond parent in front garden, seeing beloved children chased by savage dog, followed by careless owner, flies after uncle, calling *him* names – householders come to doors and cry, "Shame!"⁵¹ – also throw things at dog – things don't hit dog, hit uncle – things that don't hit uncle, hit fond parent – through the village and up the hill, over the bridge and round by the green – grand run, mile and a half without a break! Children sink exhausted – dog gambols up among them – children go into fits – fond parent and uncle come up together, both breathless.

"Why don't you call your dog off, you wicked old man?"

"Because I can't recollect his name, you old fool, you!"

Fond parent accuses uncle of having set dog on – uncle, indignant, reviles fond parent – exasperated fond parent attacks uncle – uncle retaliates with umbrella – faithful dog comes to assistance of uncle, and inflicts great injury on fond parent – arrival of police – dog attacks police – uncle and fond parent both taken into custody⁵² – uncle fined five pounds and costs for keeping a ferocious dog at large – uncle fined five pounds and costs for assault on fond parent – uncle fined five pounds and cost for assault on police!

My uncle gave the dog away soon after that. He did not waste him. He gave him as a wedding-present to a near relation.

But the saddest story I ever heard in connection with a bull-dog, was one told by my aunt herself.

Now you can rely upon this story, because it is not one of mine, it is one of my aunt's, and she would scorn to tell a lie. This is a story you could tell to the heathen, and feel that you were teaching them the truth and doing them good. They give this story out at all the Sunday-schools in our part of the country, and draw moral lessons from it. It is a story that a little child can believe.

It happened in the old crinoline days⁵³. My aunt, who was then living in a country-town, had gone out shopping one morning, and was standing in the High Street, talking to a lady friend, a Mrs. Gumworthy, the doctor's wife. She (my aunt) had on a new crinoline that morning, in which, to use her own expression, she rather fancied herself. It was a tremendously big one, as stiff as a wire-fence; and it "set" beautifully.

They were standing in front of Jenkins', the draper's; and my aunt thinks that it – the crinoline – must have got caught up in something, and an opening thus left between it and the ground. However this may be, certain it is that an absurdly large and powerful bull-dog, who was fooling round about there at the time, managed, somehow or other, to squirm in under my aunt's crinoline, and effectually imprison himself beneath it.

Finding himself suddenly in a dark and gloomy chamber, the dog, naturally enough, got frightened, and made frantic rushes to get out. But whichever way he charged, there was the crinoline in front of him. As he flew, he, of course, carried it before him, and with the crinoline, of course, went my aunt.

⁵¹ **Shame!** – (воскл.) Как не стыдно!

⁵² **both taken into custody** – (разг.) обоих сажают в каталажку

⁵³ **in the old crinoline days** – (разг.) в стародавние времена

But nobody knew the explanation. My aunt herself did not know what had happened. Nobody had seen the dog creep inside the crinoline. All that the people did see was a staid and eminently respectable middle-aged lady suddenly, and without any apparent reason, throw her umbrella down in the road, fly up the High Street at the rate of ten miles an hour, rush across it at the imminent risk of her life, dart down it again on the other side, rush sideways, like an excited crab, into a grocer's shop, run three times round the shop, upsetting the whole stock-in-trade⁵⁴, come out of the shop backward and knock down a postman, dash into the roadway and spin round twice, hover for a moment, undecided, on the curb, and then away up the hill again, as if she had only just started, all the while screaming out at the top of her voice for somebody to stop her!

Of course, everybody thought she was mad. The people flew before her like chaff before the wind. In less than five seconds the High Street was a desert. The townsfolk scampered into their shops and houses and barricaded the doors. Brave men dashed out and caught up little children and bore them to places of safety amid cheers. Carts and carriages were abandoned, while the drivers climbed up lampposts!

What would have happened had the affair gone on much longer – whether my aunt would have been shot, or the fire-engine brought into requisition against her – it is impossible, having regard to the terrified state of the crowd, to say. Fortunately for her, she became exhausted. With one despairing shriek she gave way, and sat down on the dog; and peace reigned once again in that sweet rural town.

⁵⁴ **upsetting the whole stock-in-trade** – (разг.) перевернув вверх дном весь магазин

The Man Who Would Manage (From Sketches in Lavender, Blue and Green, 1893)

It has been told me by those in a position to know – and I can believe it – that at nineteen months of age he wept because his grandmother would not allow him to feed her with a spoon, and that at three and a half he was fished, in an exhausted condition, out of the water-butt, whither he had climbed for the purpose of teaching a frog to swim.

Two years later he permanently injured his left eye, showing the cat how to carry kittens without hurting them, and about the same period was dangerously stung by a bee while conveying it from a flower where, as it seemed to him, it was only wasting its time, to one more rich in honey-making properties.

His desire was always to help others. He would spend whole mornings explaining to elderly hens how to hatch eggs, and would give up an afternoon's black-berrying to sit at home and crack nuts for his pet squirrel. Before he was seven he would argue with his mother upon the management of children, and reprove his father for the way he was bringing him up.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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