

THE MAN WHO CARRIED HIS OWN
BUNDLE.

IN the dullest part of the dullest county in England is situated the little demi-semi-fashionable bathing town of—Bless me!—I was almost betrayed by the mere force of habit into the imprudence of calling it by its name —.

Once upon a time there happened to the said little town, a very dull bathing season—every town on the coast beside was full of company; bathers, walkers, donkey-riders, saunterers and pebble gatherers, yet the luckless town of—— was comparatively empty. Huge placards with “Lodgings to let” stared every body in the face, from every window in every direction. Things of course were very flat, all ranks of people were malcontent. The shopkeepers were croaking; the proprietors of lodging houses in despair; and the



A delicious bit of scandal !

few visitors who had ventured thither in hopes of making pleasant acquaintances and dissipating their dulness were sick of *ennui*. As for that class of incurables, the resident inhabitants, they, for want of better amusement applied themselves with redoubled ardour to their favourite winter recreations of cards, and the most inveterate scandal of each other.

In this state of utter stagnation were affairs at ——— when, one very hot day in the middle of August, a stranger was seen to enter that worthy town-corporate. In the dearth of any thing in the shape of news or variety which was felt so sensibly at ——— the arrival of a stranger would have been considered a seasonable mercy, could he have been approached without the direful risk of contaminating gentility by bringing it in contact with something beneath it. But this stranger entered the town in so questionable a shape, that the very fourth and fifth rate castes in ——— stood aloof, holding themselves a peg above him. Even the shop-keepers, mantua-makers, and waiters at the taverns felt their noses curl up intuitively at the sight of him. The groups of loiterers collected at the doors of the inns, passed contemptuous comments on him as he pursued his way, and the few fashionables that were to be seen in the streets cast supercilious glances of careless superiority upon him, for he was on foot and alone, attired in a coat, waistcoat, and

in short, a whole suit, of that sort of mixed cloth called pepper-and-salt coloured, with a black silk handkerchief tied about his neck in a nautical style : he wore huge sea boots pulled over his knees, and to complete the picture, carried a large bundle in a red silk handkerchief at the end of a stout oaken cudgel over his shoulder.

Such was his dress : yet to close observers of character, there was something wholly out of the common way about the lonely pedestrian. There was that expression of cool determined courage in his large grey eyes, that whatever might be the prevailing sentiments of the community towards him, few would have been bold enough to offer him actual insult, even if he had not grasped so substantial a weapon of offence and defence as the above mentioned stout oaken cudgel, in a hand that betokened such weight of bone and power of muscle.

“ I’ll warrant me, Jack, that ’ere fist of his would prove a knock-me-down argument,” said a sailor to one of his shipmates, who was intently surveying the stranger.

“ Ey, ey, my lad, make yourself sure of that,” replied Jack, between whom and the stranger a singular look of recognition had been exchanged, *en passant*.

“ He’s a rum sort of fish, howsomever,” rejoined

the first speaker, "and I wonder what wind cast him on this shore: he dont look like a landsman, for all his pepper-and-salt gear. Mayhap you know somewhat about him, Jack?"

"Mayhap I do," replied Jack, pursing up his mouth with a look of importance; "but I han't sailed so many years in the King's service without learning to keep my own counsel—aye, or another's too, on occasion!"

"I'd wager, then this odd genus is some rascally smuggler that you have fallen alongside of, who has given you a gallon of Dutch gin to bribe you to be mum, when you see him—and I would'nt mind betting a pint that that 'ere bundle of his is full of Injee handkerchers that he has runned ashore, and has now to sell. I'll just step up, and ask him for the first sight of em, for I wants a good un."

"I'd advise you, Ben, my boy, to take another observation of his fist, before you go to crack your jokes on him!" said Jack; and Ben having done so, wisely determined on keeping his distance.

There certainly was a characteristic something in the stranger, from the tie of his handkerchief to the slight roll in his gait, that savoured of a seafaring life. Even his way of setting on his hat had not the look of a landsman. The air of sturdy independence with which he shouldered his bundle, and trudged along, shewed that he considered the

opinions of the bystanders as a matter of perfect indifference. Yet there was that about him which forcibly arrested the attention of every one; people who would not own to themselves that they thought him worth looking at once, nevertheless turned round to look at him again.

The first step he took was to search for lodgings; but these though readily found, were not so easily obtained. It was in vain that he applied to the proprietors of every lodging-house; it seemed as though he carried a bill of exclusion in his face: people shut their doors on his approach, and from the genteel marine villa to the most paltry cabin, he could not find a roof that would afford shelter to him and his bundle. The innkeepers were equally inexorable, and it appeared doubtful whether he would be permitted to rest the sole of his foot in the hospitable town of ———.

Our pedestrian might have despaired even of obtaining a night's lodging in a place where the tide of popular opinion seemed to set so dead against him, but he was no sentimental novice; he had passed the meridian of life, and was too well acquainted with mankind not to know that while he could call to his aid a few of those potent little magicians called sovereigns (and most despotic sovereigns they are) he could ensure himself any thing he pleased in the little corporation. In fact, the prudential doubts of its



A few members wanted.

inhabitants, as to the probability of his carrying any metal of that shape and colour in the queerly cut pockets of his thread-bare pepper-and-salts, was the whole and sole cause of his cool reception.

The witness of a sovereign, to which the stranger as a dernier resort appealed, procured him a supper and bed, and all things needful for rest and refreshment, at a small public house, whose crazy little creaking sign promised to travellers "Good entertainment for man and horse."

The next morning, being disincumbered of the unpopular bundle at the end of that oaken cudgel which he still either grasped or flourished in a most nautical fashion, he entered the reading room.

"It is no use putting down your name, sir, for you cannot be admitted here;" was the answer he received from the pert superintendant of this place of fashionable resort.

"Not on my paying the usual terms of subscription?" demanded the stranger.

"No, sir, we cannot admit persons of your description on any terms, sir."

"Persons of my description!" repeated the stranger, most emphatically grasping his trusty cudgel, "and pray, sir, of what description do you suppose me to be?"

The Jack in office surveyed the sturdy stranger

with a look in which contempt and alarm were oddly blended, as he replied —

“Can’t exactly say, sir, but I am sure none of our subscribers would chuse to associate with you.”

“How do you know that, you saucy Jackanapes?” said the stranger, becoming a little choleric.

“Why, sir, because, sir, we make a point of being very select, sir, and never on no account admit persons of your description.”

“But it seems you do not know of what description I am.”

“Why, sir, no one can expect to keep these sort of things secret.”

“What, then, is it whispered about who I am?”

“Whispered! Lord, sir, it was in every body’s mouth before breakfast.”

“And what does that important personage, everybody, say?”

“Oh, sir, that you are a broken down miller hiding from his creditors.” And here he cast a shrewd glance on the thread-bare pepper-and-salts of the stranger. The stranger regarded him for a moment with a comic expression on his features, made him a profound bow, and walked off.

Not a whit humbled by this repulse, the stranger repaired to the place of general promenade, and took possession of a vacant place at the end of one of the benches, on which were seated two or three

of those important people who had from time immemorial, invested themselves with the dignity of the head persons in the place. It is hardly possible to suppose such people would condescend to exchange a few remarks with a stranger of whom the only particulars known were, that he trudged into town carrying his own bundle, wore a threadbare suit of pepper-and-salts, and slept at the Golden Lion.

These worthies did not allow him time to make their acquaintance, but with an air as if they dreaded infection, they rose and departed. Not the least discomposed by the distaste the great men of little —— evinced for his society, the stranger proceeded to make himself as much at home on the bench as if it had been his inheritance. He drew from his pocket a box with an apparatus for igniting a match, lighted a cigar, and smoked for some time with great apparent relish.

At length perceiving a new set of loungers on the promenade, he hastily dispatched his cigar, and approaching one of the other benches, addressed a few courteous though trifling observations to its occupants, three ladies and a gentleman; but had his remarks been either of a blasphemous or indelicate nature, they could not have been received with a greater appearance of consternation by the ladies, who rose, alarmed at the liberty the pepper-and-salt coloured

man had taken, while the gentlemen observed with a most aristocratic demeanour, that he laboured under a mistake in addressing those ladies.

“Sir,” said the stranger, “you are right : I took you for persons of politeness and benevolence. Discovering my error, I crave your pardon, and retire.”

Although any reasonable person might have been satisfied from these specimens of the inhabitants of ——— that it was no spot for a friendly unknown individual to pitch his tent in, still “the man who carried his own bundle” persevered in his endeavours to find some liberal minded person therein. Yet, from the highest to the lowest, a general feeling of suspicion seemed to pervade the bosoms of all, and the luckless stranger resided in the town a whole week without finding a single exception. Nay, worse reports still than being a bankrupt miller got afloat.

Mine hostess of the Golden Lion served up these *on dits* with all their variations and accompaniments daily to her guest at his meals, protesting in the true tone of all dealers in such matters, her total disbelief in every thing that was said to the prejudice of her guest, — a guest, who shewed so much good taste as to prefer her house, and sufficient honesty to pay for every thing before he consumed it — which to be sure, she prudently

added, was the way in which business was always carried on at the Golden Lion.

"I wonder, then, Mrs. Pagan, that you should do so unhandsome a thing by Jack Smith, Tom Balls, and some dozen other of your customers, as to chalk up such enormous scores against them as these," said the stranger, drily pointing with his oak stick to the hieroglyphics, with which the bar was graced.

"Why, sir, to be sure, these be all 'sponsible persons," stammered Betty Pagan. Her guest muttered to himself as he passed into the street —

"Rather hard that my credit should be worse than that of Jack Smith, and Tom Balls, and the rest of Betty Pagan's customers. Faith, I must be a most suspicious looking fellow! To be sure, reports like these are of a nature to give the death-blow to my vanity, if that were a failing that could be cured by mortification. I am an ugly dog I am aware, but I did not know that my phiz was ill looking enough to indicate an old smuggler, a broken-down miller (but for that the pepper-and-salts may be thanked), a fraudulent bankrupt hiding up from his creditors, a returned convict, and a man who, having married three wives, has run away from them all!"

The habitual good temper, and light-hearted gaiety of the stranger was ruffled; and there was a compression on his brow, and an angry glow on his

cheek, as he entered that notorious gossip shop, the Post Office. The mail had just arrived, and the letters having been sorted, were delivered to their respective claimants. But there was one letter that had not been claimed, which excited general curiosity.

According to invariable diurnal custom, all the towns-people who had nothing to do, were assembled in or near the Post Office — those who expected letters, to receive them, and those who did not, to take note of the epistles directed to their neighbours, and obtain, if possible, some clue whereby to guess their contents — either from observation of hands, or seals, or haply from the expression of the countenances of the recipients, or some hint or exclamation during perusal.

The unclaimed letter was of a most tempting appearance, sealed, surmounted with a coronet — to the Right Hon. Admiral Lord A — B — and franked by the Duke of A —. Many were the surmises offered on the subject. Could it be possible that a man of his high rank meant to honour them with his presence for the season? But then he had not engaged lodgings. No matter, there were plenty disengaged. The most noble duke evidently supposed that his uncle was actually there, and it was impossible for so great a man to make a mistake. Lord A — B — would doubtless arrive that day with



Freedom of the Town — in a Box !

his suite. It would be the salvation of the town for the season to be able to announce such an arrival in the county papers—the presence of my Lord, was perhaps a prognostic of a visit from the duke and the mighty duchess.

All present were impressed with the necessity of calling an immediate town meeting, to propose presenting him with the freedom of the town, in a gilt box, which doubtless his Lordship would be polite enough to take for gold. During the discussion, in which by this time, the whole town was engaged, there were some, whose curiosity to know the contents of this important epistle was so great, as to betray them into the endeavour of forestalling Lord A——B——in reading all that was come-at-able in his letter; but the envelope was folded so as to baffle the most expert in the worthy art of round-readings.

How far the ardour of making discoveries would have carried some of them I am not prepared to say—perhaps it might have led to felonious attempts on the sanctity of the ducal seal and frank, had not the stranger (who had remained an unnoticed listener in the crowd, and had quietly seen the letter passing from hand to hand through a large circle) now stepped into the midst, and making a low bow, said—

“Gentlemen when you have amused yourselves

sufficiently with that letter, I will thank you to hand it over to me, its rightful owner."

"To you!" exclaimed the whole town and corporation in a breath, looking unutterable things, at the threadbare pepper-and-salt, of the independent individual before them. "We are surprised at your impudence in demanding this letter, which is franked and sealed by the duke of A —— and addressed to Admiral Lord A —— B ——"

"I am he, gentlemen," returned the stranger, making a sarcastic obeisance all round. "I see you do not think that the son of a duke can wear such a coat, and carry his own bundle on occasion. However, I see one within hail who can witness to my identity. Here, you Jack Braceyard, have you forgotten your old commander?"

"Forgotten your honour! No, no, my Lord," exclaimed Jack springing into the midst of the circle. "I knew your noble Lordship the moment I seed you; but I remembered your honour's humours too well to spoil sport by saluting, when you thought fit to hoist foreign colours."

"Jack, you are an honest fellow! and here's a sovereign to drink my health, for we have weathered many a hard gale together, and here's another for keeping my secret, old heart of oak. And now, gentlemen," continued Lord A —— B ——, "if you

are not yet satisfied that the letter belongs to me, here are, I trust, sufficient proofs!" as he spoke he produced from his pocket book a bundle of letters, bearing the same superscription.

The post-master immediately handed him the letter, and began a string of the most elaborate apologies, which his Lordship did not stay to listen to, but walked back to the Golden Lion, leaving the assembled population of —— mute with consternation.

That afternoon, the whole corporation, sensible too late of their error, waited in a body on Lord A——B——to apologize for their mistake, and to entreat him to honour the town with his presence during the remainder of the season.

Lord A——B——was busily employed in tying up his bundle when the deputation entered, and he continued to adjust it all the time they were speaking. When they concluded, having tightened the last knot, he replied as follows.

"Gentlemen, I entered your town with every intention of thinking well of its inhabitants.— But you will say that I came in a shabby coat, carrying my own bundle—and took up my quarters at a paltry alehouse. Upon my word it was the only place where you would give me admittance! Your reception of me would have been very different had I arrived in my carriage. Gentlemen, I

doubt it not; my rank, fortune, and equipage will procure me respect any where from people of your way of thinking. But, gentlemen, I am an odd fellow, as you see, and sometimes try whether I can obtain it without these adventitious distinctions; and the manner in which you treated me, while I appeared among you in the light of a poor and most inoffensive stranger, has convinced me of my error in looking for liberality of construction here. And now, gentlemen, I must inform you that I estimate your polite attention at the same value that I did your contempt, and that I would not spend another night in your town if you would give it to me for nothing, and so I wish you a very good morning."

As his lordship concluded, he attached his red bundle to the end of his bludgeon, and shouldering it, with a droll look at the discomfited corporation, he trudged out of the town with the same air of sturdy independence with which he had trudged in.

The sagacious town and corporation remained thunderstruck with the adventure. However, their conduct in the affair had been too unanimous to admit of their recriminating on each other the blame of this unlucky mistake; so they came to the wise resolution of making the best of a bad business, and digesting the bitter rebuke as well as they might;

moreover, they determined that their town, should not lose the credit of a visit from so distinguished a personage, and duly announced in the county papers, Lord A——B——'s arrival and departure from the town of ——.