

DICKENS
CHARLES

SKETCHES OF
YOUNG
GENTLEMEN

Charles Dickens
Sketches of Young Gentlemen

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Sketches of Young Gentlemen:*

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Sketches of Young Gentlemen

TO THE YOUNG LADIES OF THE
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland;

ALSO THE YOUNG LADIES OF

THE PRINCIPALITY OF WALES,

AND LIKEWISE THE YOUNG
LADIES RESIDENT IN THE ISLES OF

Guernsey, Jersey, Alderney, and Sark,

THE HUMBLE DEDICATION OF
THEIR DEVOTED ADMIRER,

Sheweth, —

That your Dedicator has perused, with feelings of virtuous indignation, a work purporting to be ‘Sketches of Young Ladies;’ written by Quiz, illustrated by Phiz, and published in one volume, square twelvemo.

That after an attentive and vigilant perusal of the said work, your Dedicator is humbly of opinion that so many libels, upon your Honourable sex, were never contained in any previously published work, in twelvemo or any other mo.

That in the title page and preface to the said work, your Honourable sex are described and classified as animals; and although your Dedicator is not at present prepared to deny that you *are* animals, still he humbly submits that it is not polite to call you so.

That in the aforesaid preface, your Honourable sex are also described as Troglodites, which, being a hard word, may, for aught your Honourable sex or your Dedicator can say to the contrary, be an injurious and disrespectful appellation.

That the author of the said work applied himself to his task in malice prepense and with wickedness aforethought; a fact which, your Dedicator contends, is sufficiently demonstrated, by his assuming the name of Quiz, which, your Dedicator submits, denotes a foregone conclusion, and implies an intention of quizzing.

That in the execution of his evil design, the said Quiz, or author of the said work, must have betrayed some trust or confidence reposed in him by some members of your

Honourable sex, otherwise he never could have acquired so much information relative to the manners and customs of your Honourable sex in general.

That actuated by these considerations, and further moved by various slanders and insinuations respecting your Honourable sex contained in the said work, square twelvemo, entitled 'Sketches of Young Ladies,' your Dedicator ventures to produce another work, square twelvemo, entitled 'Sketches of Young Gentlemen,' of which he now solicits your acceptance and approval.

That as the Young Ladies are the best companions of the Young Gentlemen, so the Young Gentlemen should be the best companions of the Young Ladies; and extending the comparison from animals (to quote the disrespectful language of the said Quiz) to inanimate objects, your Dedicator humbly suggests, that such of your Honourable sex as purchased the bane should possess themselves of the antidote, and that those of your Honourable sex who were not rash enough to take the first, should lose no time in swallowing the last, – prevention being in all cases better than cure, as we are informed upon the authority, not only of general acknowledgment, but also of traditionary wisdom.

That with reference to the said bane and antidote, your Dedicator has no further remarks to make, than are comprised in the printed directions issued with Doctor Morison's pills; namely, that whenever your Honourable sex take twenty-five of Number 1, you will be pleased to take fifty of Number 2, without delay.

And your Dedicator shall ever pray, &c.

THE BASHFUL YOUNG GENTLEMAN

We found ourself seated at a small dinner party the other day, opposite a stranger of such singular appearance and manner, that he irresistibly attracted our attention.

This was a fresh-coloured young gentleman, with as good a promise of light whisker as one might wish to see, and possessed of a very velvet-like, soft-looking countenance. We do not use the latter term invidiously, but merely to denote a pair of smooth, plump, highly-coloured cheeks of capacious dimensions, and a mouth rather remarkable for the fresh hue of the lips than for any marked or striking expression it presented. His whole face was suffused with a crimson blush, and bore that downcast, timid, retiring look, which betokens a man ill at ease with himself.

There was nothing in these symptoms to attract more than a passing remark, but our attention had been originally drawn to the bashful young gentleman, on his first appearance in the drawing-room above-stairs, into which he was no sooner introduced, than making his way towards us who were standing in a window, and wholly neglecting several persons who warmly accosted him, he seized our hand with visible emotion, and pressed it with a convulsive grasp for a good couple of minutes, after which he dived in a nervous manner across the room,

oversetting in his way a fine little girl of six years and a quarter old – and shrouding himself behind some hangings, was seen no more, until the eagle eye of the hostess detecting him in his concealment, on the announcement of dinner, he was requested to pair off with a lively single lady, of two or three and thirty.

This most flattering salutation from a perfect stranger, would have gratified us not a little as a token of his having held us in high respect, and for that reason been desirous of our acquaintance, if we had not suspected from the first, that the young gentleman, in making a desperate effort to get through the ceremony of introduction, had, in the bewilderment of his ideas, shaken hands with us at random. This impression was fully confirmed by the subsequent behaviour of the bashful young gentleman in question, which we noted particularly, with the view of ascertaining whether we were right in our conjecture.

The young gentleman seated himself at table with evident misgivings, and turning sharp round to pay attention to some observation of his loquacious neighbour, overset his bread. There was nothing very bad in this, and if he had had the presence of mind to let it go, and say nothing about it, nobody but the man who had laid the cloth would have been a bit the wiser; but the young gentleman in various semi-successful attempts to prevent its fall, played with it a little, as gentlemen in the streets may be seen to do with their hats on a windy day, and then giving the roll a smart rap in his anxiety to catch it, knocked it with great adroitness into a tureen of white soup at some distance, to

the unspeakable terror and disturbance of a very amiable bald gentleman, who was dispensing the contents. We thought the bashful young gentleman would have gone off in an apoplectic fit, consequent upon the violent rush of blood to his face at the occurrence of this catastrophe.

From this moment we perceived, in the phraseology of the fancy, that it was 'all up' with the bashful young gentleman, and so indeed it was. Several benevolent persons endeavoured to relieve his embarrassment by taking wine with him, but finding that it only augmented his sufferings, and that after mingling sherry, champagne, hock, and moselle together, he applied the greater part of the mixture externally, instead of internally, they gradually dropped off, and left him to the exclusive care of the talkative lady, who, not noting the wildness of his eye, firmly believed she had secured a listener. He broke a glass or two in the course of the meal, and disappeared shortly afterwards; it is inferred that he went away in some confusion, inasmuch as he left the house in another gentleman's coat, and the footman's hat.

This little incident led us to reflect upon the most prominent characteristics of bashful young gentlemen in the abstract; and as this portable volume will be the great text-book of young ladies in all future generations, we record them here for their guidance and behoof.

If the bashful young gentleman, in turning a street corner, chance to stumble suddenly upon two or three young ladies of his acquaintance, nothing can exceed his confusion and agitation.

His first impulse is to make a great variety of bows, and dart past them, which he does until, observing that they wish to stop, but are uncertain whether to do so or not, he makes several feints of returning, which causes them to do the same; and at length, after a great quantity of unnecessary dodging and falling up against the other passengers, he returns and shakes hands most affectionately with all of them, in doing which he knocks out of their grasp sundry little parcels, which he hastily picks up, and returns very muddy and disordered. The chances are that the bashful young gentleman then observes it is very fine weather, and being reminded that it has only just left off raining for the first time these three days, he blushes very much, and smiles as if he had said a very good thing. The young lady who was most anxious to speak, here inquires, with an air of great commiseration, how his dear sister Harriet is to-day; to which the young gentleman, without the slightest consideration, replies with many thanks, that she is remarkably well. 'Well, Mr. Hopkins!' cries the young lady, 'why, we heard she was bled yesterday evening, and have been perfectly miserable about her.' 'Oh, ah,' says the young gentleman, 'so she was. Oh, she's very ill, very ill indeed.' The young gentleman then shakes his head, and looks very desponding (he has been smiling perpetually up to this time), and after a short pause, gives his glove a great wrench at the wrist, and says, with a strong emphasis on the adjective, '*Good morning, good morning.*' And making a great number of bows in acknowledgment of several little messages

to his sister, walks backward a few paces, and comes with great violence against a lamp-post, knocking his hat off in the contact, which in his mental confusion and bodily pain he is going to walk away without, until a great roar from a carter attracts his attention, when he picks it up, and tries to smile cheerfully to the young ladies, who are looking back, and who, he has the satisfaction of seeing, are all laughing heartily.

At a quadrille party, the bashful young gentleman always remains as near the entrance of the room as possible, from which position he smiles at the people he knows as they come in, and sometimes steps forward to shake hands with more intimate friends: a process which on each repetition seems to turn him a deeper scarlet than before. He declines dancing the first set or two, observing, in a faint voice, that he would rather wait a little; but at length is absolutely compelled to allow himself to be introduced to a partner, when he is led, in a great heat and blushing furiously, across the room to a spot where half-a-dozen unknown ladies are congregated together.

‘Miss Lambert, let me introduce Mr. Hopkins for the next quadrille.’ Miss Lambert inclines her head graciously. Mr. Hopkins bows, and his fair conductress disappears, leaving Mr. Hopkins, as he too well knows, to make himself agreeable. The young lady more than half expects that the bashful young gentleman will say something, and the bashful young gentleman feeling this, seriously thinks whether he has got anything to say, which, upon mature reflection, he is rather disposed to

conclude he has not, since nothing occurs to him. Meanwhile, the young lady, after several inspections of her *bouquet*, all made in the expectation that the bashful young gentleman is going to talk, whispers her mamma, who is sitting next her, which whisper the bashful young gentleman immediately suspects (and possibly with very good reason) must be about *him*. In this comfortable condition he remains until it is time to ‘stand up,’ when murmuring a ‘Will you allow me?’ he gives the young lady his arm, and after inquiring where she will stand, and receiving a reply that she has no choice, conducts her to the remotest corner of the quadrille, and making one attempt at conversation, which turns out a desperate failure, preserves a profound silence until it is all over, when he walks her twice round the room, deposits her in her old seat, and retires in confusion.

A married bashful gentleman – for these bashful gentlemen do get married sometimes; how it is ever brought about, is a mystery to us – a married bashful gentleman either causes his wife to appear bold by contrast, or merges her proper importance in his own insignificance. Bashful young gentlemen should be cured, or avoided. They are never hopeless, and never will be, while female beauty and attractions retain their influence, as any young lady will find, who may think it worth while on this confident assurance to take a patient in hand.

THE OUT-AND-OUT YOUNG GENTLEMAN

Out-and-out young gentlemen may be divided into two classes – those who have something to do, and those who have nothing. I shall commence with the former, because that species come more frequently under the notice of young ladies, whom it is our province to warn and to instruct.

The out-and-out young gentleman is usually no great dresser, his instructions to his tailor being all comprehended in the one general direction to ‘make that what’s-a-name a regular bang-up sort of thing.’ For some years past, the favourite costume of the out-and-out young gentleman has been a rough pilot coat, with two gilt hooks and eyes to the velvet collar; buttons somewhat larger than crown-pieces; a black or fancy neckerchief, loosely tied; a wide-brimmed hat, with a low crown; tightish inexpressibles, and iron-shod boots. Out of doors he sometimes carries a large ash stick, but only on special occasions, for he prefers keeping his hands in his coat pockets. He smokes at all hours, of course, and swears considerably.

The out-and-out young gentleman is employed in a city counting-house or solicitor’s office, in which he does as little as he possibly can: his chief places of resort are, the streets, the taverns, and the theatres. In the streets at evening time, out-

and-out young gentlemen have a pleasant custom of walking six or eight abreast, thus driving females and other inoffensive persons into the road, which never fails to afford them the highest satisfaction, especially if there be any immediate danger of their being run over, which enhances the fun of the thing materially. In all places of public resort, the out-and-outers are careful to select each a seat to himself, upon which he lies at full length, and (if the weather be very dirty, but not in any other case) he lies with his knees up, and the soles of his boots planted firmly on the cushion, so that if any low fellow should ask him to make room for a lady, he takes ample revenge upon her dress, without going at all out of his way to do it. He always sits with his hat on, and flourishes his stick in the air while the play is proceeding, with a dignified contempt of the performance; if it be possible for one or two out-and-out young gentlemen to get up a little crowding in the passages, they are quite in their element, squeezing, pushing, whooping, and shouting in the most humorous manner possible. If they can only succeed in irritating the gentleman who has a family of daughters under his charge, they are like to die with laughing, and boast of it among their companions for a week afterwards, adding, that one or two of them were 'devilish fine girls,' and that they really thought the youngest would have fainted, which was the only thing wanted to render the joke complete.

If the out-and-out young gentleman have a mother and sisters, of course he treats them with becoming contempt, inasmuch

as they (poor things!) having no notion of life or gaiety, are far too weak-spirited and moping for him. Sometimes, however, on a birth-day or at Christmas-time, he cannot very well help accompanying them to a party at some old friend's, with which view he comes home when they have been dressed an hour or two, smelling very strongly of tobacco and spirits, and after exchanging his rough coat for some more suitable attire (in which however he loses nothing of the out-and-outer), gets into the coach and grumbles all the way at his own good nature: his bitter reflections aggravated by the recollection, that Tom Smith has taken the chair at a little impromptu dinner at a fighting man's, and that a set-to was to take place on a dining-table, between the fighting man and his brother-in-law, which is probably 'coming off' at that very instant.

As the out-and-out young gentleman is by no means at his ease in ladies' society, he shrinks into a corner of the drawing-room when they reach the friend's, and unless one of his sisters is kind enough to talk to him, remains there without being much troubled by the attentions of other people, until he espies, lingering outside the door, another gentleman, whom he at once knows, by his air and manner (for there is a kind of free-masonry in the craft), to be a brother out-and-outer, and towards whom he accordingly makes his way. Conversation being soon opened by some casual remark, the second out-and-outer confidentially informs the first, that he is one of the rough sort and hates that kind of thing, only he couldn't very well be off coming; to which

the other replies, that that's just his case – ‘and I'll tell you what,’ continues the out-and-outer in a whisper, ‘I should like a glass of warm brandy and water just now,’ – ‘Or a pint of stout and a pipe,’ suggests the other out-and-outer.

The discovery is at once made that they are sympathetic souls, each of them says at the same moment, that he sees the other understands what's what: and they become fast friends at once, more especially when it appears, that the second out-and-outer is no other than a gentleman, long favourably known to his familiars as ‘Mr. Warmint Blake,’ who upon divers occasions has distinguished himself in a manner that would not have disgraced the fighting man, and who – having been a pretty long time about town – had the honour of once shaking hands with the celebrated Mr. Thurtell himself.

At supper, these gentlemen greatly distinguish themselves, brightening up very much when the ladies leave the table, and proclaiming aloud their intention of beginning to spend the evening – a process which is generally understood to be satisfactorily performed, when a great deal of wine is drunk and a great deal of noise made, both of which feats the out-and-out young gentlemen execute to perfection. Having protracted their sitting until long after the host and the other guests have adjourned to the drawing-room, and finding that they have drained the decanters empty, they follow them thither with complexions rather heightened, and faces rather bloated with wine; and the agitated lady of the house whispers her friends

as they waltz together, to the great terror of the whole room, that 'both Mr. Blake and Mr. Dummins are very nice sort of young men in their way, only they are eccentric persons, and unfortunately *rather too wild!*'

The remaining class of out-and-out young gentlemen is composed of persons, who, having no money of their own and a soul above earning any, enjoy similar pleasures, nobody knows how. These respectable gentlemen, without aiming quite so much at the out-and-out in external appearance, are distinguished by all the same amiable and attractive characteristics, in an equal or perhaps greater degree, and now and then find their way into society, through the medium of the other class of out-and-out young gentlemen, who will sometimes carry them home, and who usually pay their tavern bills. As they are equally gentlemanly, clever, witty, intelligent, wise, and well-bred, we need scarcely have recommended them to the peculiar consideration of the young ladies, if it were not that some of the gentle creatures whom we hold in such high respect, are perhaps a little too apt to confound a great many heavier terms with the light word eccentricity, which we beg them henceforth to take in a strictly Johnsonian sense, without any liberality or latitude of construction.

THE VERY FRIENDLY YOUNG GENTLEMAN

We know – and all people know – so many specimens of this class, that in selecting the few heads our limits enable us to take from a great number, we have been induced to give the very friendly young gentleman the preference over many others, to whose claims upon a more cursory view of the question we had felt disposed to assign the priority.

The very friendly young gentleman is very friendly to everybody, but he attaches himself particularly to two, or at most to three families: regulating his choice by their dinners, their circle of acquaintance, or some other criterion in which he has an immediate interest. He is of any age between twenty and forty, unmarried of course, must be fond of children, and is expected to make himself generally useful if possible. Let us illustrate our meaning by an example, which is the shortest mode and the clearest.

We encountered one day, by chance, an old friend of whom we had lost sight for some years, and who – expressing a strong anxiety to renew our former intimacy – urged us to dine with him on an early day, that we might talk over old times. We readily assented, adding, that we hoped we should be alone. ‘Oh, certainly, certainly,’ said our friend, ‘not a soul with us but

Mincin.’ ‘And who is Mincin?’ was our natural inquiry. ‘O don’t mind him,’ replied our friend, ‘he’s a most particular friend of mine, and a very friendly fellow you will find him;’ and so he left us.

‘We thought no more about Mincin until we duly presented ourselves at the house next day, when, after a hearty welcome, our friend motioned towards a gentleman who had been previously showing his teeth by the fireplace, and gave us to understand that it was Mr. Mincin, of whom he had spoken. It required no great penetration on our part to discover at once that Mr. Mincin was in every respect a very friendly young gentleman.

‘I am delighted,’ said Mincin, hastily advancing, and pressing our hand warmly between both of his, ‘I am delighted, I am sure, to make your acquaintance – (here he smiled) – very much delighted indeed – (here he exhibited a little emotion) – I assure you that I have looked forward to it anxiously for a very long time:’ here he released our hands, and rubbing his own, observed, that the day was severe, but that he was delighted to perceive from our appearance that it agreed with us wonderfully; and then went on to observe, that, notwithstanding the coldness of the weather, he had that morning seen in the paper an exceedingly curious paragraph, to the effect, that there was now in the garden of Mr. Wilkins of Chichester, a pumpkin, measuring four feet in height, and eleven feet seven inches in circumference, which he looked upon as a very extraordinary piece of intelligence. We ventured to remark, that we had a dim recollection of having once or twice

before observed a similar paragraph in the public prints, upon which Mr. Mincin took us confidentially by the button, and said, Exactly, exactly, to be sure, we were very right, and he wondered what the editors meant by putting in such things. Who the deuce, he should like to know, did they suppose cared about them? that struck him as being the best of it.

The lady of the house appeared shortly afterwards, and Mr. Mincin's friendliness, as will readily be supposed, suffered no diminution in consequence; he exerted much strength and skill in wheeling a large easy-chair up to the fire, and the lady being seated in it, carefully closed the door, stirred the fire, and looked to the windows to see that they admitted no air; having satisfied himself upon all these points, he expressed himself quite easy in his mind, and begged to know how she found herself to-day. Upon the lady's replying very well, Mr. Mincin (who it appeared was a medical gentleman) offered some general remarks upon the nature and treatment of colds in the head, which occupied us agreeably until dinner-time. During the meal, he devoted himself to complimenting everybody, not forgetting himself, so that we were an uncommonly agreeable quartette.

'I'll tell you what, Capper,' said Mr. Mincin to our host, as he closed the room door after the lady had retired, 'you have very great reason to be fond of your wife. Sweet woman, Mrs. Capper, sir!' 'Nay, Mincin – I beg,' interposed the host, as we were about to reply that Mrs. Capper unquestionably was particularly sweet. 'Pray, Mincin, don't.' 'Why not?' exclaimed Mr. Mincin, 'why

not? Why should you feel any delicacy before your old friend—*our* old friend, if I may be allowed to call you so, sir; why should you, I ask?’ We of course wished to know why he should also, upon which our friend admitted that Mrs. Capper *was*

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