

Newbigging Thomas

Lancashire Humour



Thomas Newbigging
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PREFACE

In the present volume I have included a number of Anecdotes and Sketches which I had previously introduced into my *History of the Forest of Rossendale*, and also a subsequent book of mine, entitled *Lancashire Characters and Places*. I felt that it was admissible to do this in a volume dealing specifically with the subject of Lancashire Humour, and I am in hopes that readers who already possess copies of the works named will not object to their being reproduced here. They were worth giving in this connection, and, indeed, their omission could scarcely be justified in a book of humorous Lancashire incidents and anecdotes.

There is surely a want of discernment shown by those who object to the use of dialect in literature as occasion offers. A truth, or a stroke of wit, or a touch of humour, can often be conveyed in dialect (*rustice loqui*) when it would fail of effect in polite English. All language is conventional. Use and wont settles much in this world. Dialect has its use and wont, and because it differs from something else is surely no reason for passing it by on the other side.

I don't know whether many of my readers have read the poems of T. E. Brown. They are chiefly in the Manx dialect, not Manx as a language – a branch of the Keltic – but *Manx dialect English*. Here was a man steeped to the eyes in classical learning; a Greek and Latin scholar of the first quality, as his recently published Letters testify. But he was wise as well as learned, and his poetry, not less than his Letters, will give him a place among the immortals, just as the dialect poems of Edwin Waugh will give *him* a like place. Brown did not shrink from using the speech of the common people around him if haply he could reach their understandings and their hearts.

The proper study of Mankind is man. Not the superfine man, not the cultured man, only, but the man as we encounter him in our daily walk – Hodge in homespun as well as de Vere in velvet.

It will not be disputed that, apart from the use of dialect, there is a substratum of humour in the Lancashire character which evinces itself spontaneously and freely on occasions. There can be no doubt, also, that this humour, whether conscious or unconscious, is usually accentuated or emphasised when the dialect is the conveying medium, because its quaintness is in keeping with the peculiarities of the race. Besides, there is a naturalness, a primitivity, and therefore a special attractiveness in *all* dialect forms of speech which does not invariably characterise the expression of the same ideas in literary English.

Now, humour is such a desirable ingredient in the potion of our human existence, that it would be nothing less than a dire misfortune to make a point of eschewing the setting which best harmonises with its fullest and fairest presentation, whether it emanates from the man in clogs or from the most cultured of our kind.

Our greatest writers have recognised the worth of dialect as a medium for humour, and hence many of the most memorable and amusing characters in Scott and Dickens – to take the two writers that occur to us most readily by way of illustration – portray themselves in the dialect of their native heath.

These remarks must be taken in a general sense, and not as having any special bearing on the present contribution. The two, else, would not be in proportion. My object has simply been to gather up the waifs and strays of humorous incident and anecdote, with a view to enlivening a passing hour.

Some of the stories that I give are related of incidents that are said to have occurred in, or of persons belonging to, both Lancashire and the West Riding. It is difficult to locate all of them so as

to be quite certain of their parentage. I have tried, however, to limit myself to such as have a genuine Lancashire origin, without trenching on the domain of our neighbours in Yorkshire.

The present collection by no means exhausts the number of good stories that are to be found on Lancashire soil. It is highly probable that were half-a-dozen writers to devote some time to the subject, they would each be able to present a collection differing from all the rest in the characteristic anecdotes which they would select.

Readers outside of the County Palatine will not have any difficulty in perusing the stories. The dialect in each has been so modified as to admit of its being readily understood by every intelligent reader.

T. N.
Manchester,
December 10th, 1900.

Lancashire Humour

"Come, Robin, sit deawn, an' aw'll tell thee a tale."

Songs of the Wilsons.

If we would find the unadulterated Lancashire character, we must seek for it on and near to the eastern border of the county, where the latter joins up to the West Riding of Yorkshire.¹ Roughly, a line drawn from Manchester on the south, by way of Bolton and Blackburn and terminating at Clitheroe in the north, will cut a slice out of the county Palatine, equal on the eastward side of this line, to about one-third of its whole area; and it is in this portion that the purest breed of Lancashire men and women will be found. A more circumscribed area still, embracing Oldham, Bury, Rochdale, the Rossendale Valley, and the country beyond to Burnley and Colne, contains in large proportion the choicest examples of Lancashire people, and it is within the narrower limit that John Collier ("Tim Bobbin") first of all, then Oliver Ormerod, and, later, Waugh, Brierley, and other writers in the vernacular, have placed the scenes of their Lancashire Stories and Sketches, and found the best and most original of their characters.

The Authors I have specifically named are themselves good examples of that character, Waugh paramountly so – distinguished as they are by a kindly hard-headedness, a droll and often broad wit, which exhibits itself not only in the quality of their writings, but also in their modes of expression, and a blending in their nature of the humorous with the pathetic, lending pungency, naturalness and charm to their best work.

The peculiarities to which I have referred are due to what in times past was the retiredness of this belt of the county; its isolation, its comparative inaccessibility, its immunity from invasion. As the coast of any country is approached, the breed of the inhabitants will be found to become more and more mixed, losing to a large extent its distinctive characteristics; and it is only by an incursion into the interior that the unadulterated aborigines are to be found in their native purity. Even here, these conditions no longer exist with anything like the old force, excepting, it may be, in some obscure nook out of sound of the locomotive whistle. Of these there are still a few left, though not many.

The old barriers of time and distance have been obliterated. The means of, and incentives to, migration, have become so easy and great that our "Besom Bens" and "Ab-o' th'-Yates" are grown as scarce as spade guineas, or as the wild roses in our Lancashire hedges, and will ere long exist only in the pages of our native humorists.

The writer of the Introduction to the 1833 edition of John Collier's "Tummas and Meary" makes a wide claim for the antiquity and universality of the Lancashire dialect in England in the past. He says: "Having had occasion, in the course of interpreting the following pages, to refer to the ancient English compositions of such as Chaucer, Wycliffe, other poets, historians, etc., I have been led almost to conclude that the present Lancashire dialect was the universal language of the earliest days in England."

Without going quite so far as the writer just quoted, it may be admitted that his contention is not without warrant, as is proved by the very large number of words and phrases of the dialect that are to be found in the Works of Gower, Chaucer, Spenser, Ben Jonson, Shakespeare, and other of our older authors, as well as in the earlier translations of the Bible. The conclusion may certainly be drawn that in the Lancashire dialect as spoken to-day there are more archaic words, both Celtic and Gothic, than are to be found elsewhere in England.

¹ In their speech, their employments, their habits and general character, there is much in common between the natives of Lancashire and their neighbours of the West Riding.

The Rev. W. Gaskell, M.A., in his lectures on the dialect, says with truth that: – "There are many more forms of speech and peculiarities of pronunciation in Lancashire that would yet sound strange, and, to use a Lancashire expression, strangely 'potter' a southern; but these are often not, as some ignorantly suppose, mere vulgar corruptions of modern English, but genuine relics of the old mother tongue. They are bits of the old granite, which have perhaps been polished into smoother forms, but lost in the process a good deal of their original strength."²

There have been of recent years many observant gleaners in these fruitful Lancashire fields. Waugh, Brierley, Oliver Ormerod, Samuel Laycock, Miss Lahee, J. T. Staton, Trafford Clegg and other writers have done much to illustrate the character and habits of the people of the County Palatine in their Sketches, Stories and Songs. We owe ungrudging thanks to the writers in the vernacular for the treasures with which, during the last thirty or forty years, they have adorned our Lancashire literature; for the rich legacy they have left us; for having taught us so much of homely wisdom in the quaint tongue of our people, and opened up to us in wider measure than we previously knew, the bright commonsense and humour that are enshrined in their hearts.

They have illustrated for us the various phases, both in speech and thought, of a virile and otherwise important section of the people that go to make up the inhabitants of this Island of ours. They have exhibited the genuine homeliness and simplicity of the people of the county, as well as their native shrewdness and strength of character; their kindliness of heart, their natural insight and aptitude; their characteristic humour – for the gracious gift of humour is theirs in a remarkable degree – their flashes of wit and repartee; their peccadilloes and graver faults, as well as their many admirable virtues; their strenuous working lives, and their abandonment to play as occasion serves – for it is a marked feature of Lancashire people that they work hard and play hard.

They have shown us, also, how rich in resource is the dialect of the county, compacting and crystallizing its phrases and proverbs, and have proved how capable it is of giving expression to the natural affections. It is only of comparatively recent years that we have been able to appreciate the wealth of the dialect in these respects. All the material was in existence before, but it needed the cunning hand of the master to make literature of it; to weave up the warp and woof, and present them to us in an embodied form.

A good deal of the humour of our Lancashire writers is of the rollicking kind, no doubt. It does not always belong to the school of high culture. But, on the other hand, we have got the characters true to the life, and he is a fastidious critic, or worse, who would prefer a counterfeit presentment to the genuine portrait.

The subject of Lancashire character, or, indeed, of any peculiarities of local and provincial character in general, with its manifestations either of pathos or humour, may not be one of very great profundity. That is not any part of the claim we make. It may even be considered trivial by some. Those, however, who take such a view, if there be any such, are surely lacking in breadth of vision. To do what we propose is to come nearer to the hearts of the people and their ways of thinking than is possible in the higher and broader flights of the more general historian. And, indeed, the work of the humble gleaner often assists the more ambitious and dignified chronicler in his labours to depict the greater personages and events in the history of his country. The ways of thinking of the people, and also the subject-matter of their thoughts, may be good, or they may be commonplace, or they may be mean, but to enter into their thoughts so as to get at their spirit, helps at least to an understanding of them.

Admitting for a moment the triviality of the subject, we cannot always be sitting like Jove on the heights of Olympus; and even when in loftier mood we do emulate the high emperizes of the gods, we are fain to descend at times – and there is true wisdom in so descending – to refresh ourselves

² Two Lectures on the Lancashire Dialect, by the Rev. W. Gaskell, M.A., Chapman & Hall, 193 Piccadilly, London, 1854, p. 13.

with a touch of Mother Earth – to seek in the vale below that necessary relaxation from the strain and stress of high thinking.

When all is said that can be said, a collection of this kind is a contribution to an important branch of folk-lore and folkspeech, and in that respect, if in no other, should be widely acceptable.

It is not, of course, pretended that all the anecdotes here given are new. Some of them are "chestnuts" I am aware – though chestnuts are generally good or they would not deserve to be chestnuts – but they illustrate certain traits of character, and that is a sufficient reason for reproducing them. Neither are we prepared to vouch for the absolute truth of all the stories. Some of them, either in whole or in part, are probably due to an effort of the imagination. In that sense they are true, and certainly they are each characteristic of individuals whom we all know, and who, from our experience of their eccentricities, might safely be set down as the actors in them.

Notwithstanding all that has been done by the writers already named, there is great abundance of good things still ungarnered, in the way of racy anecdotes, wise apothegms, and striking sayings, all too good to be lost – as indeed may be their fate unless pains are taken to record them in permanent form. Even the ludicrous conclusions and remarks of the half-witted – those of whom it is said in the vernacular that "they have a slate off and one slithering," – are often sufficiently striking or amusing to be worth putting on record.

"The clouted shoe hath oft-times craft in't," as says the rustic proverb.

We have it on the authority of Shakespeare that a jest's prosperity lies in the ear of him that hears it. This is generally so, and especially in those instances where the jest, or the story, is clothed in dialect, and depends for a full appreciation on a knowledge by the listener of the peculiar characteristics of those from whom it emanates. For this reason it is doubtful whether, say, the people of the southern portion of our Island are able to enter into, so as to fully enjoy, our more northerly humour; just as we of the north may not be able to thoroughly enjoy theirs. Antipathy, also, to a particular form and mode of spelling and pronunciation intervenes to prevent full enjoyment on both sides. For this reason the writers in dialect are placed at a disadvantage as regards the extent of their audience. Most of their best things are caviere to the general, or, rather, to the particular.

In a letter to a Rossendale friend, John Collier has an interesting reference to the dialect and the extent to which it is used. In this letter the writer offers an apology for, or rather a defence of, his "Tummus and Meary" against certain strictures that had been passed upon it on account of its broad Lancashire speech.

He says: "I am obliged to you for a peep at your friend Mr Heape's ingenious letter. When you write, please to return him my compliments, and thanks for his kind remembrance of me; and hint to him that I do not think our country exposed at all by my view of the Lancashire Dialect: but think it commendable, rather than a defect, that Lancashire in general, and Rossendale in particular, retain so much of the speech of their ancestors. For why should the people of Saxony, and the Silesians be commended for speaking the Teutonic or old German, and the Welsh be so proud (and by many authors commended too) for retaining so much of their old British, and we in these parts laughed at for adhering to the speech of our ancestors? For my part I do not see any reason for it, but think it praiseworthy: and am always well pleased when I think at the Rossendale man's answer, who being asked where he wunned, said, 'I wun at th' riggin o' th' Woard, at th' riggin o' th' Woard, for th' Weter o' th' tone Yeeosing faws into th' Yeeost, on th' tother into th' West Seo.'"

Curiously enough, the dialect in "Tim Bobbin's" day was considered as too plebeian in character to deserve notice. It was looked upon simply as the vulgar speech of the common people, and altogether unworthy of attention and study by better-instructed mortals. Even well into the present century, dialect in general was not held in estimation for any useful purpose, and it is only in comparatively recent years that its value as an aid to the study of racial history has been recognised.

It may be admitted that Collier, in his celebrated sketch, is sometimes so broadly coarse as to shock even a taste which is not fastidious; but allowances must be made for him in his efforts at the truthful portraiture of the characters as he knew or conceived them.

In the fifties, when I was a young fellow of twenty or thereabouts, I was personally acquainted with Oliver Ormerod, the author of "A Rachde Felley's Visit to th' Greyt Eggshibishun." He was a smart, dapper, hard-headed Lancashire business man, of medium height, inclining to be stout; clean and bright in appearance, and gentlemanly in his manners. At that time he had written and published his "Rachde Felley," but though we often conversed on the characteristics of the people of East and South Lancashire – a subject with which he was well familiar – he never mentioned to me the circumstance of his being the author of the amusing sketch, which was published anonymously. I rather think that it was but few even of his intimate friends in his native town of Rochdale who knew or suspected at first that he was the author of that clever and amusing brochure.

Possibly he feared that to have associated his name with the work would have injured him in his business. For, however erroneous the notion may be, it was at one time held that business and the occasional excursion into the by-paths of literature were incompatible. His case, I am glad to say, was an instance in point refuting the too common belief that the practice of one's pen in vagrant literary work – outside business pure and simple – is a drawback to success, for his record as a man of business was one of the best.

Of the sterling excellence of Oliver Ormerod's little work, "Th' Rachde Felley" there cannot be two opinions. It is original in its conception and in the way it is carried out; full of humour, and racy of the soil of Lancashire. The popularity of the book was immediate and great. It rapidly went through several editions, and it has since had many imitators. Its success led Mr Ormerod to write a second similar work, giving the "Rachde Felley's Okeawnt o wat he and his Mistris seede un yerd wi' gooin to th' Greyte Eggshibishun e London e 1862." This, like most other sequels, is not equal to the original, though if it had been the first to appear it would still have been noteworthy.

The following from "A Rachde Felley" is a good example of his humour:

"Aw seed a plaze koed Hyde Park Cornur, whure th' Duke o' Wellington lives, him as lethurt Boneypart; 'e's gettin an owd felley neaw. Aw bin tow'd as one neet, when 'e wor at a party as th' Queen gan, as th' owd felley dropt asleep in his cheer, an when the Queen seed 'im, hoo went an tikelt his face whol 'e wakent. Eh! heaw aw shud o' stayrt iv hoo'd o dun it bi me. Th' owd chap drest knots off Boney, didnt 'e? But aw'm off wi' feightin; aw'm o fur Kobden an' thame as wantin' fur to do away wi' it otogethur, fur ther wod'nt be have as mony kilt i' ther wur no feightin. O'er anent th' Duke's heawse, at th' top o' wot they koen Constitution Hill, aw seed a kast iron likeness ov 'im oppo horseback, as big as loife an bigger. He'd a cloak on an' a rowlur pin i' one hond, saime as wimmen usen wen they maen mowfins. Aw' nevr noed afore wat 'e wor koed th' Iron Duke for.

"At tis present toime it started o' raynin', an' so aw thrutch'd mi road as fast as aw cud goo in a greyt creawd o' foke, an' as aw wor gooin' on, a homnibus koome past, an' a chap as stoo'd at th' bak soide on't bekont on me fur to get in. Thinks aw to mesel 'e's a gud naturt chap; aw gues 'e sees as aw'm gettin mi sunday clewus deetud. 'E koed o' th' droiver fur to stop, an' ax'd me iv aw wur fur th' Greyt Eggshibishun, an' aw sed, ah, an' wi' that 'e tow'd me fur to get in, an' in aw geet. We soon koome to th' Krystil Palus. Eh! wat a rook o' foke ther wor there, aw never seed nawt loike it afore, never! Aw geet eawt o' th' homnibus, an' aw sed to th' felley as leet me ride: Aw'm very mich obleeght to yo aw'm shure, an' aw con but thank yo, an' aw wur turnin' reawnd fur to goo into th' Palus, wen 'e turn'd on me as savidge as iv he'd a hetten me, an' ax'd me fur forepenze. Forepenze, aw sed, what for? An' 'e made onsur, for ridin', to be shure, Sur. Waw, aw sed, didn't theaw koe on me fur to get in? But o' as aw cud say wor o' no mak o' use watsumever, an' th' powsement sed as iv aw didn't pay there an' then, he'd koe a poleese as wor at th' other side o' th' road, an', bi th' mon, wen aw yerd that, aw deawn wi' mi brass in a minnit. Aw seed as aw wor ta'en in; same toime, it wor

a deyle bettur fur to saddle wi' th' powedurt, nur get into th' New Bailey so fur fro whome. Thinks aw ti mesel', iv aw'm done ogen i' this rode aw'm a Dutchmun."

Ormerod, like that other genial humorist, Artemus Ward, affected a peculiar spelling, or rather mis-spelling, of his words, which, in my opinion, was a mistake. There was no necessity for this. It does not enhance the humour of his sketches in any special degree, but only renders him more difficult to read. Dialectical spelling need not necessarily be bad English.

As a writer of Lancashire stories, Waugh is unsurpassed. His pages overflow with a humour which is irresistible and almost cloyed by its exuberance. But even about his drollest characters there is a pathetic tenderness which touches the heart. It is not easy, for example, to read some parts of "Besom Ben" and "The Old Fiddler" without a lump in one's throat, so much akin are laughter and tears in the hands of this master. If it were not that his themes are principally the work-a-day Lancashire folk, and that the dialect limits and muffles his fame, Waugh would be ranked (as he is ranked by those who know him) as one of the first humorists of the century.

Waugh is incomparable in his curious ideas and touches and turns of expression, ludicrous enough many of them, but all rich in Lancashire humour and well calculated to excite the risible faculty. Speaking of a toper in one of his sketches he says:

"Owd Jack's throttle wur as drufty as a lime brunner's clog."

Again: "Some folk are never content; if they'd o' th' world gan to 'em, they'd yammer for th' lower shop to put their rubbish in!"

Oatmeal he calls "porritch powder."

Again: "Rondle o' th' Nab had a cat that squinted – it caught two mice at one go."

Addressing his donkey, Besom Ben said: "Iv thae'd been reet done to, thae met ha' bin a carriage horse bi neaw!"

"Robin o' Scaawter's feyther went by th' name o' 'Coud an' Hungry'; he're a quarryman by trade; a long, hard, brown-looking felley, wi' 'een like gig-lamps, an' yure as strung as a horse's mane. He looked as if he'd bin made out o' owd dur-latches an' reawsty nails. Robin th' carrier is his owdest lad; an' he favours a chap at's bin brought up o' yirth-bobs an' scaplins."

These are of course the merest example of the many curious sayings and comparisons that are lavishly scattered through Waugh's pages.

Ben Brierley was an adept at telling a short Lancashire story. In giving expression to the drollest figures of speech he maintained a mock gravity which greatly enhanced the presentment, whilst the peculiar puckering of the corners of his mouth and the merry twinkle in his eye told how thoroughly he entered into the spirit of the characters he portrayed. His "Ab' o' th' Yate" in London bubbles over with humour, and it is a true, if somewhat grotesque, account of what would be likely to arrest the attention of a denizen of that out-of-the-way village of "Walmsley Fowt" on a visit to the great metropolis.

Some years ago I attended a meeting held at Blackley where Ben gave a number of racy Lancashire anecdotes, told in his own inimitable way. I may quote one or two of these which are not given in the collected edition of his writings.

"Long Jammie wur a brid stuffer, an' it used to be his boast ut he'd every fithert animal, or like it, ut ever flew on wing, or hung on a wall. He'd everything fro' a hummabee to a flying jackass, an' he'd ha' a pair o' those last if Billy o' Bobs would alleaw hissel' to be stuffed."

"Theau'rt one thing short," Billy said one day as he're looking reawnd Jammie's Musaum, as he co'd his collection.

"What's that?" Jammie ax'd.

"It's a very skase brid," Billy said, "Co'd a sond brid."

"Ay, it mun be skase or else I should ha' had a speciment i' my musaum," Jammie said. "But what is it like?"

"It's like o' th' bit-bat gender," Billy said. "It's a yead like a cat, and feet like a duck, an' when it flies it uses its feet like paddles to guide itsel'."

"But why dun they co' it a sond brid?"

"Well, theau sees, it's a native o' th' Great Desert o' Sara, an' when it's windy, it flies tail first to keep th' sond eaut o' its een."

Billy Kay had had a lot of his hens stown, an' he never could find eawt who th' thief wur. He'd set a trap, but someheaw it didno' act. Shus heaw, it never catch't nowt.

Bill had a parrot ut wur a bit gan to leavin' th' cage an' potterin' abeaut th' hencote when th' hens wur eaut. But as it had bin brought up to a soart o' alehouse life, it wanted company. It had learnt to crow so natural ut th' owd cock wur curious to know what breed it belonged to. So he invited Pol to spend a neet wi' him an' th' family, an' gie' th' cote a rooser. Th' parrot went, and they'd a merry time on't. It wur late when they went to roost, an' they'd hardly had a wink o' sleep when Pol yerd summat oppen th' cote dur. Then ther a hont lifted to the peearch, an' one after another o' th' hens wur snigged off, till it coome to th' owd cock. Pol thowt it wur gettin' warm, so hoo says to th' owd rooster, "Hutch up, owd lad, it's your turn next!" Ther no moore hens stown!

"Owd Neddy Fitton's Visit to the Earl o' Derby" is one of the finest sketches in the vernacular; giving, as it does, a realistic picture of the old-time Lancashire farmer. It is bright with humour, not wanting in pathetic touches, and with that warm human interest that lends charm and distinction to the homeliest story.

Miss Lahee, the writer, was Irish both by birth and up-bringing. Coming to Rochdale, where she lived for many years, the character of the Lancashire people and their idiom won her sympathy, and she studied both to such purpose as to produce not only the story in question, but a number of other sketches and stories in the dialect. It is no disparagement to these latter to say that none of them is equal to her sketch of "Neddy Fitton." This has long been popular in the county Palatine, and its intrinsic merit is such that it deserves a still wider circle of readers.

Lancashire has from time immemorial been famous for its mathematicians, botanists, and naturalists among the humbler ranks, and Crabtree as an Astronomer has his niche in the temple of fame. There was another worthy of rather a different stamp who professed acquaintance with that sublime science, Astronomy, though his credentials will hardly be considered sufficient to justify the claim. Jim Walton was a well-known character, at one time living at Levenshulme. Modest enough when sober, when he had imbibed a few glasses of beer Jim professed to be great in the mysteries of "ass-tronomy." The names of the planets, their positions and motions in the heavens were as familiar to him as the dominoes on the tap-room table, and he knew all the different groups of stars and their relative positions. One night Jim was drinking in the village "Pub" with a number of boon companions, toppers like himself – and the conversation, as was usual when he was present, got on to the stars and other heavenly bodies, on which Jim expatiated at length. A mischievous doubt, however, was expressed by one of the company, whether, after all, Jim really knew as much about astronomy as he professed to do. So, to maintain his reputation by proving his knowledge, Jim made a bet of glasses round with his opponent that the *moon would rise at a quarter past nine o'clock that night*.

Accordingly, about ten minutes before the time named, the company all staggered out into the backyard to see the moon rise as predicted.

"Now then, chaps, look here!" cried Jim, "Let's have a fair understandin'. Recolect, it's on th' owd *original* moon 'at awm betting, noan o' yer d – d new ones!"

Needless to say this was a poser for their bemuddled brains, and with sundry expletives at Jim and the qualification he had announced, they all staggered back to their places in the more comfortable tap-room.

Jim's idea of "th' owd original moon," and his thorough contempt for quarter and half moons, strikes us as irresistibly funny. We can imagine the new, vague light that would dawn on the minds of the half-fuddled roysterers as he announced his reservation in favour of the whole or none.

However prejudiced, as a rule, the British workman may be against the introduction of labour-saving appliances in the way of automatic machinery, circumstances sometimes arise when he can fully appreciate their value and advantages. This will appear by the following characteristic anecdote:

—
An Oldham chap, who, for some misdemeanour, had found his way into Preston House of Correction, was put on to the tread-mill. After working at it for some time till his back and legs ached with the unwonted exercise, he at length exclaimed:

"Biguy! if this devil had been i' Owdham, they'd a had it turned bi pauer afore now!"

Another good story of an "Owdham" man is the following: At one of the Old Trafford County Cricket matches we overheard a conversation that took place between two Owdhamers. A pickpocket, plying his avocation, had been caught in the act of taking a purse, and quite a commotion was created in that corner of the field as the thief was collared by a detective and hauled away to the police station. Says the Oldham man to his friend who was seated next him:

"Sharp as those chaps are, they'd have a job to ta' my brass. Aw'll tell thi what aw do, Jack, when aw comes to a place o' this sooart; aw sticks mi brass reet down at th' bottom o' mi treawsers pocket, and then aw puts abeaut hauf a pint o' nuts at top on't; it tae's some scrawpin out, aw can tell thi, when tha does that!"

Pigeon fancying and flying is an absorbing pursuit with many of the Wigan colliers. Men otherwise ignorant (save of their daily work in the mine), are profoundly versed in the different breeds and capabilities of the birds. The training of them to fly long distances on their return to their lofts and within a comparatively brief space of time, is a passion which absorbs all their thoughts.

One such enthusiastic pigeon flyer was lying sick unto death, with no prospect of recovery. The parson paid him a visit and endeavoured to turn his thoughts to his approaching end. The casual mention by the parson of heaven and the angels interested the dying man. He had seen angels depicted in the picture books with wings on their shoulders. An idea struck him and he enquired:

"Will aw ha' wings, parson, when aw get to heaven?"

"Yes, indeed," replied the parson, willing to humour and console him as best he might.

"An' will yo ha' wings too when yo get theer?"

"Oh yes, I'll have wings too, we'll both have wings."

"Well, aw tell thi what," said the dying pigeon fancier, his eye brightening as he spoke, "Aw tell thi what, parson, when tha comes up yon, aw'll flee yo for a sovereign!" A striking example of the ruling passion strong in death!

It is well known that an admiration for dogs of a high quality, not less than for pigeons, is a weakness of the Lancashire collier, who will spend a small fortune to gratify his taste in this direction. A Tyldesley collier had a favourite bull-pup. This canine fancier with his dog and a friend were out for a ramble in the fields, and to make a short cut to get into the lane, his friend began scrambling through a hole in the hedge. The dog, unable, it may be presumed, to resist the sudden temptation, seized the calf of the disappearing leg with a grip which caused the owner of the said leg to shriek with pain. Despite his frantic wriggles and yells the brute held fast, and its master, appreciating the situation, clapped his hands in enthusiastic admiration, at the same time calling out to his beleaguered companion:

"Thole it, Bill! Thole it, mon! Thole it! It'll be th' makin' o' th' pup!"

Another such on returning home and finding that the day's milk had disappeared from the milk basin, angrily enquired what had become of it, and receiving for answer from his better-half that she had "gan it to th' childer for supper!" exclaimed: "Childer, be hang'd! thae should ha' gan it to th' bull pup!"

Some years ago there appeared in *Punch* sundry sketches of incidents in the mining districts. These may not all be true in the sense that the occurrences represented actually took place. But there

is a spirit of truth in them, in that they illustrate a phase of the rudeness that often accompanies untutored tastes and undesirable habits.

The appearance of a stranger in the mining village, especially if he happens to wear a black cloth coat, is sometimes resented by the denizens of the place.

The new curate, a meek-looking individual, had arrived, and passing the corner of a street where a group of colliers had assembled, one of them asked:

"Bill, who's yon mon staring about him like a lost cat?"

"Nay, I doan't know," replied the other, "a stranger belike."

"Stranger, is he?" responded the first, "then hey've a haue brick at 'im!"

The same, accosting one of his flock resting on a gate, and wishing to make himself agreeable, tried to open a conversation with the remark:

"A fine morning, my friend," was pulled up with the reply:

"Did aw say it war'nt? – dun yo' want to hargue?"

It is surprising how a person of regular habits feels the lack of any little comforts and companionships to which he has been accustomed. A Lancashire collier had lost a favourite dog by death, that, on Saturday afternoons or Sundays, he had been in the habit of taking with him for a stroll. An acquaintance sitting on a gate saw the bereaved collier coming along the road trundling a wheelbarrow.

"What's up wi' thee, Bob – what ar' t' doin' wi' th' wheelbarrow, and on good Sunday too?"

"Well, thae sees," replied Bob, "aw've lost mi dog, an' a fellow feels gradely lonesome bout company, so aw've brought mi wheelbarrow out for a bit of a ramble."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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