



**THE ASTOUNDING ADVENTURE**  
OF  
**WHEELER J. CALAMITY.**  
RELATED BY HIMSELF.

I CANNOT say how it came to pass but I found myself at the bottom of the pond!

I should tell you, first of all, that I am head clerk to a serious mercantile firm; and that my abode, when I am at home, is at Clapham. I am a man of a grave and thoughtful turn of mind, and I spend my leisure in reflecting on the awful ways and disreputable goings on of lost sheep in general. I am a valued member of a strict dissenting congregation; and if there is one feature of my existence upon which I pride myself more than another, it is on my method of keeping Sunday. Yes, Sunday at Calamity Lodge may fairly be taken to be, in the matter of solemnity, the perfection of melancholy propriety. I regard it as a species of Prize Sunday, and as such I hold it up to as many of my friends as will come and look at it. They regard it as the goal to which their Sunday-keeping endeavours should unanimously tend. With the exception of my servants, there is not one soul in Calamity Lodge who was ever known to be guilty of doing anything useful on the seventh day.

It is, perhaps, unnecessary for me to add that I have never read a play, or entered a playhouse in the course of my virtuous life. Nevertheless, I have printed and published many vigorous and soul-harrowing denunciations of these works and tabernacles of the Evil One; and I have shown, beyond dispute, that they sow the seed of every vice that can degrade humanity. The play-houses are, I am told, not all closed, but then I have not yet finished the series of pamphlets I am directing against them.

To return to the opening paragraph of this paper. I cannot say how it came to pass that I found myself at the bottom of the pond, but there I was. It was on Christmas Day, and I had been spending the evening with a fallen Brother who, as I had previously learnt, was not at peace with all men. In point of fact, he was not at peace with me, for an Enemy had put it into his head that I had misappropriated some chapel funds. It was a charge which I could best meet with a dignified silence; but as he had expressed his intention of bringing it before the flock, I could not consistently with my conscientious scruples allow him to remain one single hour in so evil a frame of mind, if it lay in my power to prevent it. So I repaired to his abode, and as I could hit

upon no other way of bringing him to a sense of his wickedness, I wrote him a cheque for a large amount - the very amount, as it happened, of the money which he had charged me with misappropriating.

Upon this we shook hands, and he drank my health. It was, I well remember, in choice old port. To prove myself at perfect charity with him, I drank his health, and we both shed tears. Then I drank the health of his help-mate, who is buxom and fair to look upon. Then that of his twain daughters, who are of a pleasing countenance. Then (for at Christmas time I can make no distinction of class), of his various servants. Lastly, my fallen Brother proposed a toast which, with ill-timed humour, he described as *Our Noble Selves*. I objected, at first, to this, as savouring of unchristian vanity, but I suffered myself to be over-ruled, and I then joined the family in a song of jubilee that, if I recollect aright, expressed rejoicing and pious satisfaction at our being all "here again" - at our passing of another Christmas together. Then I bade them farewell, and proceeded to my home.

As I have no recollection of anything that occurred between my leaving his home and my finding myself at the bottom of a pond on Clapham Common, I conclude that I was even at that time under the influence of the extraordinary spell which led me into the adventures I am about to relate. I have a distinct recollection of feeling myself suddenly immersed in icy water, and of finding myself in the act of sinking into unfathomable depths. Eventually, I found myself at the bottom of the pond, which to my utter amazement appeared to be a large chamber gorgeously furnished as a bed-room, with a resplendent, but tawdry couch

on which I was lying, when I fully recovered my senses.

Everything around me was cheaply gaudy. The couch groaned and cracked under me as I turned round to examine the apartment. The hangings of the room were of crimson calico, bespattered with gilt lions. The bed-curtains were of the coarsest muslin, and the flooring was of dirty deal, badly laid, and full of closed trap-doors of a peculiar mechanical description. An attendant, who was attired in a grotesquely fantastic garb, heard me cough, and finishing an eccentric dance which he was practising before a looking-glass, turned to see what I wanted.

"Pray, am I dead, or is this some mistake?" asked I, in blank astonishment.

He replied in a jaunty tone,

"No, you're not *dead* yet, though you are *a-wake!*"

He emphasised the words I have printed in italics, in such a manner as to convey to me the impression that they had some double meaning. But I have no notion what it was. I am afraid that I began to lose my temper, for I inquired indignantly,

"What in the world is the meaning of this tom-foolery?"

"Hush!" said he, below his breath. "Pray take care. Fortunately, nobody heard you but myself, or you would have been severely punished. Don't you know that there is no rhyme to tom-foolery in the singular?"

"In the singular?" said I, completely puzzled.

"Yes," whispered he. "You can use it in the plural if you like, for 'tom-fooleries' is an allowable rhyme to 'Tooleries' where the EMPEROR OF THE FRENCH resides in Paris, you know."

"I haven't the remotest notion what in the world -"

"Hush - pray, hush," whispered my attendant. "That line's a great deal too

long. You'll get yourself into serious trouble if you don't take care. Pray, oh pray, remember the metre!"

"What! Measure out by yards all I repeat?" asked I, in astonishment.

"No, not exactly *yards* - it's done by *feet*," replied he triumphantly, aloud. Then he added under his breath, "There, that's much better - we are getting on nicely."

"Pray, will you kindly tell me where I am?" asked I, in despair.

"A very good decasyllabic line," remarked my attendant in a patronizing whisper. Then aloud:

"Last night to the Regions of Burlesque you cam!"

"I '*cam*'? - what's that?" said I.

"Hush," whispered he. "'You cam', for 'you came'. It's for the rhyme."

"But I see no necessity for rhyme."

"You'll learn the reason of it all in time. Our code of regulations isn't long - I'll tell you all about them in a song."

And after premising in a whisper that he would adapt the song he was about to sing to the air of a profane ballad, known to him and his friends as "The Sugar Shop", he began to howl forth the following unmeaning words:-

"If you intend to stay with us, before you've been a day with us

You'll learn the proper way with us, of saying what you say with us;  
Each speech should have a pun in it, at very lowest one in it,

And if you can't bring none in it, you'd better cut away!

"Rule, rule of where you've been intruding to,

Fool, fool, learning please begin;  
You'll, you'll learn to be alluding to,  
The neighbourhood of Chancery-lane as 'skid-a-ma-Lincoln's Inn'!"

"But skid-a-ma-Lincoln's Inn appears to be unmeaning nonsense. What in the world has Lincoln's Inn to do with it?" asked I.

"Hush," whispered he; "You're all wrong again, you can't scan that line. Say, 'But why allude to Lincoln's Inn, pray tell?' and I'll answer you."

"But why allude to Lincoln's Inn - pray tell?" said I, in obedience to his instructions.

"Because it fits into the line so well," he answered, triumphantly; and then he proceeded to the second verse, which appeared to me to be even more idiotic than the first.

"And when of punning speech, you know, the end you nearly reach, you know,

Experience will teach, you know, a comic song to screech, you know;  
And laughter to enhance, you know, each song should have a dance, you know,

(A needful circumstance, you know), a dozen minutes long!

"Rule, rule, enjoyment not diminishing,  
Fool, fool, booby, booby, boob -  
You'll, you'll learn each ballad finishing,  
With a flip up in the skid-a-ma-link, and a flip in the juben-jube!"

And here he proceeded to dance about in such a dreadfully wild and reckless manner, that I really feared that he would end up by dislocating all his limbs at once.

"How dare you call me 'fool and booby boob'?" I asked, with not unnatural irritation.

"Because I find no other rhyme to 'jube', - with the exception of 'pneumatic tube', - which couldn't easily be introduced, - and so I hope my rudeness stands excused."

He then proceeded to tell me, in preposterous rhymes, that if an inhabitant of the Region of Burlesque ventured to speak aloud in prose he was liable to be beheaded on the spot, and that to finish a comic song otherwise than with a comic dance, was penal servitude for life. It was in vain that I represented to him that I could not extemporize songs of

any description - that the only tune I knew was the National Anthem - that I had never attempted to rhyme a couple of words in my life, and that as for a pun, I had as great a horror of it as of the theatre itself. He could offer me no consolation in my difficulty, nor could he hold out any hope of pardon if I offended by publicly speaking in prose.

He advised me to begin to study the art of rhyming with facility, and he placed a volume in my hands containing all the known rhymes, possible and impossible, in the English language. He recommended me to study them for a couple of hours, and he promised at the expiration of that period, to introduce me to the KING OF BURLESQUE and his court.

As soon as my attendant (whose name was BILLIBOLLIBOSKI NINCOMPOOP) had left me, I set to work on the volume he had given me. In it I found an alphabetical list of words that rhymed with each other after the fashion of a WALKER'S Rhyming Dictionary, only much more complete, and appendix containing a list of twenty-seven thousand three hundred and ninety-two puns, all more or less (generally less) original. The scores of seven hundred and thirty-two (or thirty-five, I forget which), comic and sentimental songs, concluded the volume. I worked at it for the two hours with no result worth mentioning, and I hailed the appearance of my attendant as a convict under sentence of death hails the appearance of the sheriffs who are to lead him to execution.

BILLIBOLLIBOSKI NINCOMPOOP arrayed me in a garment of a fantastic description, and then led me through the streets of a large town to the King's palace. I was much struck with the appearance and demeanour of such of the inhabitants as I happened to see on my way. They were all dressed in

costumes as astounding as the one I wore myself, and they had, for the most part, astonishing heads of hair. The young men were especially remarkable, for they had lovely complexions, beautiful eyes, a quantity of back hair, usually with a tortoiseshell comb stuck into it, and extraordinary figures for boys. Their legs were remarkable fine, and they appeared particularly proud of them, for they lost no opportunity of exhibiting them, by twirling quickly round, and so disarranging the loose drapery of their tunics. Whenever one of these young men met a gentleman or lady, I noticed that after a short conversation, full of bad jokes (at which neither of them laughed), they began to dance in a wild and altogether irrelevant manner. And, indeed, I found that they frequently danced in this way when they were quite alone, and at almost every corner was to be found a young man or young woman finishing a soliloquy by dancing in the peculiarly reckless manner I have described. The young women wore dreadfully short dresses, and if it had not been that I felt curious to learn the habits and manners of so extraordinary a people, I should certainly not have thought of looking at them.

Perhaps the most startling features of this astonishing country were to be found in the celestial phenomena which met my gaze whenever I looked upwards. Instead of the beautiful blue vault of heaven to which I have ever been accustomed, I found that the sky descended in short strips about six feet apart to the very roofs of the houses. Between these strips I could catch occasional glimpses of rough men dressed much in the garb of ordinary British carpenters. They appeared to be engaged in pulling tackle and in turning windlasses, though with what object I never could make out. The stars, too, were not scattered over the

heavens as are the stars that we see in England, but they appeared to grow in long rows between the strips of sky to which I have alluded, and parallel to them.

At length my companion and I reached the King's palace. It was as gaudy and in as execrable taste as the apartment in which I found myself when I first arrived. Everything looked cheap, tawdry and ricketty, and the very throne on which the monarch sat was made of rough deal coarsely gilt on the front portion of it alone.

As we entered we found the king surrounded by his court, who were singing what appeared to be the local National Anthem, to the air of an old Scotch song, called, if I remember aright, "The Laird of Bonnie Cockdee". It ran, I think, as follows:-

Oh, the lords of creation of every degree  
Consider our monarch as great as can  
be,  
Whoever they are, they acknowledge  
you see,  
That never there was such a monarch as  
he.  
Wherever you go you will hear it  
allowed,  
That great as he is he is not at all proud,  
But he'll take from his subjects of  
humblest degree,  
Sure never there was such a monarch as  
he!

Upon which the king replied,  
"My Lords and Gentlemen, - I'm  
greatly flattered by the neat verses  
you've so glibly pattered. By "neat" I  
don't mean strong, but *bona fide*, I call  
them neat because they're pretty tidy."

The king then caught sight of me,  
and in bad doggrel, wanted to know  
where I came from and all about me.  
BILLIBOLLIBOSKI threw me into a state  
of fearful confusion by whispering that  
it was expected of me that I should  
immediately extemporize a  
complimentary song. There was no

time for reflection, so I extemporized  
the following clever parody on the  
popular British anthem before alluded  
to. I have italicised the portions which  
I altered from the original: -

GOD save our gracious *King*,  
Long live our gracious *King*,  
GOD save the King.  
Send *him* victorious,  
Happy and glorious,  
Long to reign over us,  
GOD save the King.

I was pained to find that this really  
neat parody met with little or no  
approbation from the court. *I* thought it  
rather good for a first attempt. The  
king, however, received me graciously,  
and immediately appointed me his  
Leading Loko Median. I haven't, to  
this day, the faintest notion what the  
title implied.

The MONARCH had a beautiful  
daughter, the PRINCESS PRETTY  
PICKLEYICKLEYSING, to whom he was  
good enough to introduce me. As I had  
left my excellent though elderly wife at  
Clapham, I considered her as good as  
dead, so I felt no scruple in devoting  
myself to this lovely girl. I was  
prompted to this rather by a desire to  
convert her to my own doctrines, and  
to add her to the faithful flock of which  
I was an honoured though humble  
member, than by any notion of mere  
worldly love. But alas for her, she was  
betroted to a young Prince - PRINCE  
POPPETSKIN, who appeared to  
monopolize her society.

The PRINCESS was very rude to me  
indeed, and as for PRINCE POPPETSKIN,  
his behaviour was outrageous. He was  
perfectly well aware of the difficulty I  
had in speaking in rhyme, and he  
delighted to address me in a single line  
ending with a word to which it was  
almost impossible to find a rhyme,  
such as "month", "silver", "orange",  
"writing-desk", "bismuth", and so on.

The PRINCESS followed his lead, so that I had the greatest difficulty in keeping up a coherent conversation with her. After I had interchanged a word or two with either of them, they would begin to sing a comic duet, in which I was forced to take my part. As I have no idea of singing, and never knew an air throughout, it will be easy to see that my position in this awful Court was anything but desirable. I soon exhausted the British National Anthem, and all the parodies could be made on it. At first I relied solely upon it, and introduced it whenever I had a chance, but eventually I became such a nuisance, that as soon as I began it, everybody left the room.

I had only one pun, and that I also introduced whenever a pun became necessary. It was a very neat one, and founded on the curious similarity in sound between “merry twinkle” and “periwinkle”, but I found no little difficulty in inventing an excuse for its introduction whenever I made a remark. It necessitated going a long way round, and saying a great deal more than I wanted to say, which involved me in another difficulty -that of finding a dozen rhymes instead of only two. Now the only rhymes I could think of were the following: management and banishment, cockles and noddles, twelfth and self, London and hunting, Grammarian and Mary Anne; so anything like intelligent conversation was altogether out of the question.

This state of things lasted for twelve months. I am not going to give an account of all the difficulties I encountered in the course of that period: I reserve that for a large work which I propose to publish, and which will give a detailed account of all my sufferings during my sojourn in the Region of Burlesque. Eventually I was sentenced to death, because I could not find a trisyllabic rhyme to

Postlethwaite, - that at least was the ostensible reason, though I incline to the belief that I had by that time made myself such an intolerable nuisance with my National Anthem, my five brace of rhymes, and my only pun, that my speedy death was unanimously desired. I was neatly decapitated on the day twelve-month after my arrival, and immediately on my decapitation I found myself somehow transported to a cell of the Wandsworth Police-court. From this humiliating durance I was liberated by a benevolent magistrate, and, after depositing five shillings with his worship for the good of Her Majesty the QUEEN, I reached my home, to (I hope) the great joy of my wife and all my children. Here is their good health and all their families, and may they live long and prosper!

W. SCHWENCK GILBERT.