

of his very plain statement that a kind friend had advanced him a considerable sum.

"Who could that friend be?" was the puzzling question, which no one could answer; but his unremitting attention to business, the punctuality of his payments and other evidences of his prosperity, suffice to insure him general respect, though certain envious busybodies would venture now and then to hint significantly, that "all is not gold that glistens."

So matters went on pleasantly with the Wags, till winter, when Tom and his three sisters came home for the holidays, and the latter assisted their mother in preparing for the festivities of the season.

It was Christmas eve, and the whole of the family were congregated in the little back parlor, when young Jerry started up at the well-known sound of a customer at the shop door at which he arrived with a hop, step and jump; and, jerking it open, beheld a little old gentleman wrapped in a large cloak.

"Please to walk in, sir," said Jerry Wag.

"Hush!" whispered the stranger, placing his forefinger on his mouth; "I want to surprise them. You're altogether to-night, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jerry, smiling, for he thought he knew to whom he was speaking.

"That's all right," said the odd elderly gentleman, advancing cautiously towards the darkest part of the shop and throwing off his cloak. "Now for a Christmas frolic! Come here, you rogue! Why you've grown taller than me. That's right! a thriving Wag! Now, mind, you go back as if nothing had happened, and give me hold of your coat-tail, so that I can't be seen. That'll do. No laughing, you young monkey. There, step along."

Jerry did as he was bid, save that, though he bit his lips unmercifully, his risible muscles would not remain inactive, and thus the oddly joined pair made their way into the family apartment just as the eldest daughter had exclaimed, "Now, mamma, it's your turn to wish!"

They were sitting in a semi-circle before the fire, and the stranger and his shield, of course, stood behind them.

"Heighho!" said Mrs. Wag; "there's only one thing I wish for to-night, and that is the addition of one more to our party."

"Name! name! You must name your wish!" cried three or four juvenile voices, in full glee.

"I wish I could tell you his name," said Mrs. Wag, "but your father knows who I mean. Don't you, my dear?"

"I can't mistake you my love," replied Jeremiah, affectionately, "and I wish he could see how happy we are. It would do his heart good, I really think."

"Who can he be?" exclaimed the eldest daughter.

"Perhaps it's somebody like me!" cried the little odd gentleman, stepping briskly forward.

"It is! it is!" shrieked mamma, and up jumped the whole party, and down went Mrs. Wag upon her knees, while, utterly unconscious of what she did, her arms were clasped round the neck of her benefactor, whose bodily frame being unable to sustain her matronly weight gave way, and so they rolled together on the floor.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the eccentric elderly gentleman, as soon as he recovered breath, but without attempting to rise. "This is a Christmas gambol, eh! Master Wag?—eh! my merry little Wags?—Needn't ask you all how you are."

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Jeremiah, "allow me to assist you. I hope you are not hurt."

"Hurt!" cried the little gentleman, jumping up, and offering his hand to Mrs. Wag. "Hurt," why, I feel myself twenty years younger than I did five minutes ago. Never mind, ma'am.—Like Christmas gambols. Always did.—Happen to have such a thing as a bunch of mistletoe, eh?"

"I am sure, sir," whimpered Mrs. Wag, "I shall never forgive myself. To think of taking such a liberty; I—I can't conceive how I could—"

"As often as ever you please, my good lady," said the eccentric, handing her to a chair; "but sit down and compose yourself, while I shake hands all around." And, turning towards Jeremiah, he commenced the ceremony, which he went through with from the eldest to the youngest, calling them all by their names as correctly as though he were a constant visitor.

A right merry Christmas eve was that. The young Wags were, ever and anon, obliged to hold their sides, as they laugh-

ed and screamed with delight at the funny little old gentleman, who romped and played with them with as much glee as though he had been the youngest of the party. So the hours passed quickly away till unwelcome sound of "bedtime," was whispered among the little circle; and then one after another departed, until Mr. and Mrs. Wag were left alone with their honest guest.

The hearts of both were full, and they began to endeavor to express their feelings; but the singular old gentleman stopped them by saying:

"Needn't tell me. Know it all. Shall run away if you go on so. Remember I told you I had more of the 'ready' than I knew what to do with. Couldn't have done better with it, eh? Out at interest now. Best sort of interest, too. More pleasure than receiving dividends, eh! Never was happier. So come, let us wind up for the night. I've a memorandum or two for you in my pocket-book," and he placed it on the table, and began to turn over divers papers, as he continued, "Hem! ha! Yes. Those two. You'd better take them, my good sir. They'll admit William and Stephen to Christ Church—what they call the Blue-Coat School. Capital school, eh?"

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Jeremiah. "Don't interrupt me, that's a good fellow," said the old gentleman. "Hem! Do you ever smoke a pipe?"

"Very rarely," replied the wondering Mr. Wag.

"Well," continued his guest, "take that paper to light your next with. Put it in your pocket, and don't look at it till I'm gone. Hem! Tom's master says he will make a good scholar; so if you've no objection, I was thinking he might as well go to college in a year or two. Not in your way, perhaps? Never mind. I know some of the big wigs. See all right, and enter his name. Should have one parson in a large family, eh?"

Here Mrs. Wag could no longer refrain from giving vent to her overcharged feelings by certain incoherent ejaculations, which terminated in a flood of tears.

"Humph!" said the old gentleman. "my spectacles want wiping." And he took the opportunity of rubbing them and blowing his nose, while Jeremiah was comforting the wife of his bosom, and telling her not to be so foolish, although he could scarcely avoid sniveling himself.

"Hem! hem!" resumed their guest; "I think I've got some of the mince pie sticking in my throat. Stupid old fellow to eat so much, eh?"

"Better take another glass of wine, sir," said Jeremiah. "Give me leave, sir, to pour it out?"

"No, no, exclaimed Mrs. Wag, starting up and smiling through her tears, let me! Nobody else! God bless you, sir!"

"And you, too!" ejaculated the old gentleman, gaily; "come, that's a challenge! Glasses round! and then we must say good-night. Don't let us make a dull end of a merry evening."

Warm benedictions were forthwith uttered, and the "compliments of the season" were wished, with more than common sincerity, by all three, as their glasses met jingling together. Then, the whimsical guest tossed off his wine, jumped up, shook his hosts heartily by the hand, wished them good-night, and sallied into the shop to find his cloak.—Mr. and Mrs. Wag followed, and expressed a hope that he would honor their Christmas dinner by his presence on the following day; but all they could draw from him was:

"Can't promise. Ate and drank a little too much to-night, perhaps. Getting shockingly old. See how I am in the morning. Enjoyed myself this evening. A jolly set of Wags altogether.—Merry Wags all, eh?—young and old.—Well, well, wag along happily, my dear Mr. and Mrs. Wag! Goodnight!" And after once more shaking hands with them, he nimbly whisked himself out at the shop-door, and trotted across to the King's Arms.

No sooner were the worthy couple alone, than curiosity led them to examine the piece of paper which their benefactor had presented to Jeremiah for the purpose of lighting his pipe, and it proved to be the promissory note which the latter had signed for the first thousand pounds. The donor's intention was plain enough, as it was regularly canceled, so Mrs. Wag was obliged to use her pocket handkerchief once more; and her spouse, after striding three or four times across the room, felt himself also under the necessity of taking out his, and blowing his nose with unusual vehemence. Then they congratulated and comforted each other, and said their prayers, and offered

up their thanksgivings with a fervor and sincerity that proved they were not unworthy of their good fortune. Then they retired to rest, though not immediately to sleep, for they were each beset by strange waking dreams, and beheld in their minds' eye, a black clerical Wag, two long-coated little blue Wags, with yellow netter investments, and other Wags of sorted sizes, but all very happy.

On the following morning, being Christmas day, our fortunate shopkeeper equipped himself in his best apparel, and, before breakfast, stepped across the road, and found Mr. Titus Twist rubbing his eyes in his own gateway. Mutual salutations and "compliments of the season" were exchanged in good neighborly style, and then mine host exclaimed:

"There's a box here for you, Master Wag, left by that queer little old gentleman. I'm sure he's cracked! In he comes here yesterday, just after dark, posting in his own carriage. Well, he orders up anything as we happened to have ready, and I sets him down to as good a dinner as ever any gentleman need sit down to, though I say it, because why, you see, our larder's pretty considerably well-stocked at this season. So down he sits, rubbing his hands, and seeming as pleased as Punch, and orders a bottle of wine; but, before he'd been ten minutes at table, up he jumps, claps on his cloak and hat, and runs smack out o' the house, and never comes back again till past eleven at night, when he pays his bill, and orders horses for six o'clock this morning."

"Is he gone, then?" exclaimed Jeremiah.

"Off, sure enough," replied Titus; "but he's left a great box for you, which I was just going to send over. So, I suppose, you and he have some dealings together."

"Yes," said Mr. Wag, "I shall have cause to bless and thank him the latest day I have to live; but I wished he had stopped here to-day. Well, God bless him, wherever he has gone. Hark ye, neighbor—you have often heard me speak of having a friend—well, that's him. I don't know why, but he's taken a fancy to me, and my wife and family, and has done for us more than you'd believe, if I was to tell you. However, we can chat that over another day, as I can't stop now, as Mrs. Wag and the children are waiting breakfast. But where's the box? I'll take it with me, if you please."

"If two of the strongest fellows in my yard can take it over, it's as much as they can," replied Titus. "However, they shall try, and I hope you'll come over this afternoon and crack a bottle of my best to drink the little queer old gentleman's health. But, mind me, he's cracked to a certainty, and you'll find it out some of these days."

The box was accordingly delivered, and on being opened was found to contain a dozen separate packages, each directed for one member of the Wag family, the largest for Jeremiah the smallest for little Philip, a "rising three" year old Wag. Their contents were far too various for precise specification, but could not have been more judiciously appropriated nor more gratefully received, so that Christmas day was a day of rejoicing; and the only regret felt by one and all the Wags was that their very kind friend had not stayed to spend it with them.

When the festive season was over matters went on as usual with Jeremiah, save that perhaps there was more of cheerfulness in his manner while pursuing his course of steady industry. The fact was he never now felt perplexed about money affairs, which were wont formerly to occupy much of his time by day, and cause him many sleepless hours by night. Those who had called for payment were as welcome as those who came to pay, and consequently his credit stood high; and the travelers and London houses strove, by tempting bargains and peculiar attention in "selecting the best articles to complete his kind orders," to keep his name upon their books. So he went on and prospered in all his undertakings, and in the course thereof visited the metropolis to make purchases, and, when there, called upon Mr. Goodfellow, who gave him a hearty welcome, but could not be persuaded to reveal the name of his eccentric client though he scrupled not to say that he was in good health, adding, with a smile, "and in perfect possession of his intellects."

Jeremiah next endeavored to worm the secret from his bankers, but with no better success. The partner who received him assured him that the steady increase and respectability of his account had wrought such an impression in a quarter which he was not permitted to name, that their house would feel much pleasure in

making advances whenever anything advantageous offered itself for purchase.

"It is wonderful!" exclaimed Jeremiah.

"A good character, my dear sir," observed the banker "is everything in trade. We are dealers in money; and nothing pleases us more than placing it where we know it is safe, and have every reason to suppose it may be useful."

"But," observed Jeremiah, "you know nothing about me."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Wag," said the banker; "you are what we call a good man, and have got a back."

"A back!" exclaimed the bewildered shop-keeper.

"Yes," said the banker, smiling, "that is, a good friend to your back; and though he chooses to keep himself in the background, depend upon it he'll not forsake you so long as you go on as you have done. Therefore, buy away for ready cash as largely as you please, and we'll honor your drafts."

On this hint Jeremiah subsequently acted, by making purchases which enabled him to serve his customers "on terms that defied all competition." Therefore and by dint of strict attention and civility his trade continued to increase till he was obliged to add warehouses to his shop, and employ a regular clerk and collector, besides shopmen, porters and wagoners.

In the meanwhile young Tom Wag studied Latin and Greek with a neighboring curate; William and Stephen were in due course, admitted into the Blue-Coat School, and the education of the other children went on precisely as had been recommended by their eccentric benefactor whose advice Mr. and Mrs. Wag considered equivalent to commands. Still they were often uneasy about him, and more particularly after another Christmas eve had passed without his appearance. Poor Mrs. Wag was sure he was ill, and would occasionally charge him with unkindness for not letting her know, that she might go and nurse him. But again months and months rolled away, and at last autumn arrived, and with it brought the grand denouncement of the mystery, as suddenly as their former good luck.

All the Wags who were at home were sitting round a tea-table in the little garden at the back of the house, and Mrs. Wag was sedately filling their cups when one of the younger children exclaimed, "Who's that?"

Jeremiah looked around to where the child was gazing and beheld his benefactor stealthily approaching from the back door, with an arch smile on his countenance, as though wishing to take them by surprise; but perceiving that he was discovered, he stepped nimbly forward according to his usual custom, and holding out his hand, said:

"Well, my dear Wag, how are you? How are you, my dear Mrs. Wag?—and how are you, young Jerry Wag, Mary Wag, Sarah Wag, Henry Wag and Philip Wag?"

All expressed their delight at his appearance, according to their different ages and abilities, but all were evidently delighted, and none more than the strange little gentleman himself, whose eyes sparkled with gratification as he took his seat, looked round at the joyous group and begged to join their family party. Mrs. Wag felt somewhat tremulous at first, and doubtless her visitor perceived it, as he turned his attention to the little Wags till she had finished her table arrangements and handed him a cup of tea.

"Thank you, my good lady," said he "That's as it should be. All merry Wags together, eh?"

"We—we—thank God!" whimpered Mrs. Wag; "we are. Yes! But it's all your doing sir. I wish I could thank you as I ought."

Here Jeremiah, perceiving that his spouse was too nervous to make an excellent speech, "took up the cudgels" of gratitude; but, saving that there could be no doubt of his sincerity, displayed no great oratorical talents. Brief, however as his speeches, or rather ejaculations, were, the funny old gentleman stopped him by the apparently funny observation:

"So, my good Jeremiah Wag, you don't know where your father came from?"

"No sir, indeed," replied the shop-keeper, marveling at the oddity of the question.

"Well, then, I do," said his benefactor; "I was determined to find it out because the name is so uncommon. Hard work I had though. Merchant, to whom he was clerk, dead. Son in the West Indies. Wrote. No answer for some time—then not satisfactory. Oblige-

ged to wait till he came back. Long talk. No use. Well, well. Tell you all about it another day. Cut it short now. Found out a person who was an intimate friend and fellow-clerk with your father. Made all right. Went down into the north. Got his register."

"Really, sir," stammered Jeremiah; "it was very kind of you, but I am sorry you should have given yourself so much trouble; but I'm sure, if I have any poor relations that I can be of service to in employing them, now that your bounty has put me in the way of doing well, I shall be very glad, though I never did hear talk of any."

"No, Master Jeremiah," said the eccentric old gentleman, "you have no poor relations now, nor ever had; but your father had a good-for-nothing elder brother who left home at an early age, after your grandmother's death, and was enticed to go abroad by fair promises which were not fulfilled. So, not having anything agreeable to write about, he didn't write at all, like a young scamp as he was, and when the time came that he had something pleasant to communicate, it was too late, as his father was no more and his only brother (your father) was gone nobody knew where. Well, to make the story short, that chap, your uncle, was knocked about in the world, sometimes up and sometimes down, but at last found himself pretty strong upon his legs, and then made up his mind to come back to Old England, where he found nobody to care for him, and went wandering hither and thither, spending his time at watering-places, and so on, for several years."

"And pray, sir," inquired Jeremiah, as his respected guest paused, "have you any idea what became of him?"

"Yes I have," replied the little gentleman, smiling significantly at his host and hostess. "One day he arrived in a smallish town, very like this, and terribly low-spirited he was, for he'd been ill some time before, and was fretting himself to think that he had been toiling to scrape money together, and was without children or kindred to leave it to. No pleasant reflection that! Well, he ordered dinner, for form's sake, at the inn, and then went yawning about the room; and then he took his stand at the window, and, looking across the road, he saw the name of Wag over a shop-door, and then—You know all the rest! The fact is, I am a Wag, and, Jeremiah Wag, you are my nephew, and you my dear Mrs. Wag, are my niece, and so let us be merry Wags together."

Betsy was reading the exchanges the other day, when she came across the following conundrum:

"When is a woman like a vehicle?"

"When she's sulky."

When reaching home in the evening she met us at the door, and spoke thusly: "Me Lord! Can you tell me when a woman is like a vehicle?"

We answered nay. She said, "I can."

For a moment she was lost in reflection, at the expiration of which she exclaimed: "Now I have it. When she's a little buggy."

A big-whisky guzzling fellow who came home drunk one night, and sat down by the fire to warm his feet, which were regular "bug smashers." Says the legend: After dosing some time he awoke chilly; the embers were entirely hid from view, and seeing his feet he mistook them for his little boy, when, with a majestic side-wave of the hand, he said: "Stand aside, my little son, and let your poor father warm himself."

An unfortunate Indian missionary had his sermon reported as follows:—

"The speaker was a deduction, and gave a learned description of Satan and his skill in sawing trees." The unhappy preacher wrote a piteous remonstrance to the editor of the paper which had published this resume, to say that he was a Dutchman, and not a deduction, and that he had described Satan, not as sawing trees, but sowing tares.

"May I ask the time of day, sir?" said a stranger to Mr. Buffers. "By all means, sir—by all means," replied the amiable Mr. Buffers. "Well, sir, what time is it?" "Upon my word I don't know. I have not watched the time lately."

"Most people decline to learn only by their own experience, and I guess they are more than half right, for I don't s'pose a man could get a correct idea of molasses candy merely by letting another feller taste it for him."