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Rural Congregationalism; or, Farnworth as it was fifty to seventy years ago. With humorous sketches and anecdotes, illustrating Lancashire manners and customs (1881)

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One weaver who had taken in his work, and was returning with materials for another stye of fancy work, including new healds and reed, was met by a neighbour of his who was going to the same "putter-out" with his cut or piece, which he was conscious was not so perfect in its workmanship as it both might and ought to have been, owing to his having had a lazy fit and a two or three days' drinking bout, and he anxiously enquired of his neighbour (who, bye-the-bye, was a regular wag, and fond of playing off a practical joke)--

"Well, Joe, wot soart uv o' humour is th' owd chap in to-day?"

"Oh," says Joe, "hee's in o regular tantrum today."

"Has he baited thee?"

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"Aye, has he, un to some tune too, but awve cussed him reet weel; he never wur better cussed sin he wur born."

"Un wot did he say to thee, Joe?"

"Nowt, for he ne'er spoke to me after awd cussed him so."

The weaver went on his way fully determined to follow Joe's example if there should be any occasion for his doing so. Of course the cut or piece was loudly condemned in inspection, and a very heavy abatement taken off the wages for the spoiled work, which reduction the weaver stoutly resisted, and he began to curse the "putter-out" and to use most abusive and threatening language to him. This conduct naturally exasperated the "putter-out", so that he refused to let the weaver have any more work after such insolence and bad workmanship, telling him never to come there again.

The poor fellow had never expected such a termination to his highly reprehesible conduct, and he went off home in a very disconsolate mood.

As he passed Joe's house, Joe stood at his garden gate, smoking his pipe quite happy and contented, and seeing his neighbour looking so sorrowful and downhearted, and without any materials for fresh work, he thus saluted him,--

"Ello, owd cratur, wots up neaw?"

"Waw, yon owd raskill winnot lemme have anny mooar wark."

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"Wot for?" said Joe.

So he told Joe how "he had cussed th' putter-eawt for baitin' him so mitch".

Joe assumed an air of innocent surprise, and said,--

"But thae didn't let him yer thi cuss him, did to?"

"Yaw, wot else? Didn't thae cuss him for baitin' thee, un he said nowt to thi for it?"

"Aye", replied Joe, "but then aw didn't begin o' cussin' him till awd getten across two fields, mon! Dust to think awr sitch o foo' uz furt start o' cussin' him to his face? Iv aw had done, aw should o' bin beawt wark too. Awl tell thi wot mon, never faw eawt wi' or cuss anybody ut theaw expects to get owt fro, except theawrt sure us they are so far off ut they cannot yer thi."

The poor fellow left Joe a sadder, if not a wiser man. This anecdote is introduced to illustrate the frolicsome manner of some of the every-day characters, to whom a good practical joke was as good as a meal's meat, and was very frequently indulged in whenever an opportunity was offered for playing off such a joke.

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Another strange character who lived not far from Jemmy Jackson, and who also assisted in building the Old Chapel, but in a much humbler department of the work, was a man of the name of Nicholas Howarth, who was quite a cynic, if not a misanthrope. He was certainly a strong woman hater, and he had lived in the present day he would have been a firm opponent of Miss Becker and all her disciples.

He had a remarkably slow and emphatic manner of speaking, which considerably increased the pungency of his keen satirical wit. At that period there were no beer houses and very few breweries, for the landlord of each public house brewed his own ale or beer. Nicholas Howarth, like many others, was very fond of a pint (or more) of good ale, and going one Saturday evening into the public house kept by Thomas Tonge, at Ringley Bridge, who was noted for not putting too much malt into his brewings, Nicholas strolled into the tap-room, which was quite full of company, and calling for a pint of ale, he took a good pull at it, and setting down the pot, he said to the landlord, who was busy serving his numerous customers,

"Awl tell yo wot, Tummus, yoar ale just shutes ma pallit; it does for shure."

The landlord, who was rather pleased to have his beer so praised before all the company, said,--

"I am very glad, Nicholas, to hear you praise my beer, for I know you to be a very good judge of what ale ought to be. Drink up what you have, and I will treat you to another pint."

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This offer was most eagerly accepted, and on Nicholas considerably lessening the second pint by a hearty draught therefrom, he smacked his lips and said,--

"It's grand stuff, un it just shuted ma complaint to a tee."

The landlord then enquired what peculiarity there was in the beer that suited Nicholas so admirably?

"Waw", says Nicholas, in his usual slow and deliberate style of speech, "your ale just shuted mi because aw cannot do wi' it strung".

This negative recommendation excited shouts of laughter from the assembly of topers, amidst which the landlord retired thoroughly discomfited and mortified at such a joke being played upon him.

Some little time afterwards, three or four young men were going along over Kersley Moor, where Nicholas was at work paving the turnpike road, and they, knowing his peculiarities, agreed to go up to him and have some fun. They accosted him as follows:

"Well, Nicholas, you are hward at work, I see".

"Aye".

One of them then enquired if Nicholas had any news?

"Nowe", he replied, "han yoa anny?"

"Aye", another of the young men said, "han yo yeard obeawt yon woman e Clifton uts kilt her husband th' last neet?"

"Nowe", said Nicholas, "haz hoo dun so?"

"Aye", replied the young man.

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Nicholas broke out most vehemently, "Waw then, awd noather hang hur or brun hur tut deeoth"

"Nay", said another of the young men to his companion, "theawrt makin' o greight mistake mon; it wur not o woman uts kit hur husband, it wur o mon wots kilt his wife!" When Nicholas thus heard the tale reversed, he promptly retorted, "Marry come up, I dar say hoo desarved it!" and at once he resumed his laborious occupation.

This poor fellow came to a sad end, for he afterwards commited suicide by hanging himself behind his door.

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Another original and queer character, who with his life Alice resided for many years in "Gaskell's Row", was an old man of the name John Morris, generally known as "Owd Morris". The writer well remembers several circumstances in connection with this individual, but will only record two or three as illustrative of the ingratitude, ignorance, and careless indifference of the lower classes of little more than a century ago.

This John Morris was one day standing with a member of the congregation of the old Independent Chapel at the top of the Chapel Lane, shortly after the consecration of St John's Church in September,

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1826, and speaking of the Old Chapel as being now quite out of favour, for he was certain that everybody would now go to the new Church as it was termed; for, says he, pointing down the Chapel Lane towards the Old Chapel,

"Theeur thin nowt but th' prayers o' th' heart, but ut th' Church yon, thin th' prayers o' th' Almighty hissel, un this printed in o buk too mon!"

Shortly afterwards his wife Alice as struck down by a painful disease, and Dr. Moore of Bolton, was sent for, who on visiting her, found her system so much reduced that he recommended her to drink port wine, and he sent her a bottle of medicine, which no doubt was a tonic.

Old Morris went down to Darley Hall where Benjamin Rawson, Esq., and all his family then resided. He made known his wife's case to Miss Rawson, who was very kind and generous to all the poor people in the neighbourhood, and she gave him a wine bottle about three parts filled with port wine. On his way home again, Mr Dyson met him and enquired how his wife Alice was? Old Morris soon told where he had been and the nature of his errand to Darley Hall, and pulling the wine bottle from a capacious pocket inside his coat, he exhibited it to Mr Dyson in a very dissatisfied spirit, and grumbingly said:

"See yoa, hoos but gan mi o piece ov o bottle full; hoo met o gan me o gradely full bottle when awd cumn o' purpose for it:" to which ungrateful speech Mr Dyson answered, "Well, John, I am sure you

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ought to be very thankful to Miss Rawson for what she gives you, for it was only last week that they gave you almost an entire leg of mutton at the Hall." (A fact which Mr Dyson had previously become acquianted with.) Old Morrison lifetd up his head and angrily retorted:

"Wot sinnifies that; it ud o greight bin booan in it." As if he expected that a leg of mutton entirely free from bone should have been specially provided for his acceptance. During his wife's sickness, she was visited by the Rev. Mr Burton, who was the first clergyman at Halshaw Moor Church; and on his kindly enquiring how Alice was, old Morris testily answered, "was, hoo's no bether, un istid o awterin hoo wussens, un th' docthur uz sent hur sum fizzic uz wur so nowt it ud peighsun o dug: it's noan fir fur no christian furt' tak."

Mr Burton asked to see the medicine, and old Morris brought him the bottle which he examined. On his being invited to taste "heaw nowt it wur", he asked for a spoon, on which old Morris turned round a small table, took the spoon with which he had eaten his porridge to breakfast out of the basin in which it stood, and seeing that there was a portion of dried porridge adhering to the spoon, he first put it into his mouth and licked it, and finding that it was not clean, he rubbed it with his thumb, and then again licked it and wiped it on his coat tail and then handed it to the clergyman as being now perfectly clean; but

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Mr Burton politely declined the proffered spoon, and pulling out the book he tasted the medicine from the bottle, and then remarked: "It is not so bad taking, John, and I feel confident that it will do your wife good if she will take it according to the doctor's instructions." But old John persisted in saying that "it ud peighsen o dug; but he wur shure no dug wud tak it, un their Ailse shudn't tak it noather."

The poor woman gradually sand and grew weaker from day to day, although she was carefully nursed and attended to by the Misses Gaskell who lived in the large house fronting the Bolton ad Manchester road. The writer has several times heard Miss Hannah Gaskell describe the death-bed scene which she witnessed whilst nursing poor old Alice who lay on a bed near the fireplace in the kitchen where they lived.

"Old Morris" was eating his porridge at the round table before mentioned, and Miss Hannah Gaskell was watching by the bedside ready to soothe and minister to the sick patient's wants, when perceiving an alarming and sudden change in old Alice's countenance, she called Old Morris to the bedside and whispered to him anxiously: "John, she is dying". He looked at her for a few moments and then said: "Aye, poor think, hoo's gooin aw con see," and he then went and sat down to his porridge again; but before ha had emptied the dish, poor Alice gave a convulsive sob and all was over, for her spirit had taken its flight to the unknown and unseen world. Miss Hannah Gaskell called out to Old Morris:

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"John, she is dead;" on which he again arose from his meal, and coming to the bedside he looked earnestly upon the inanimate form of his late wife, and then he calmly said:

"Aye, hoo's deead shure enoof; poor owd craythur!" and then suddenly exclaiming, "well, luck bi wi thi wench," he returned to the table and finished eating his porridge without any emotion whatever!

Some people might consider this as a philosophical acceptance of the inevitable, but it was more to be attributed to an apathetic and callous indifference, arising from ignorance and natural depravity.