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Staton, James Taylor (1816-1875)

***Cures for th' Toothwertch* (186?)**

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Ladies un Gentlemen.—Yoa mun aw on yoa imagine me i' that pleck ut religious foak caw th' confeshunal. Awm gooin t' own to some oth facts ut are bun up wi my history, but not, awm sorry to say, i' that style which bookbinders caw “full gilt”. There is, nevertheless, un notwithstonsin, a deol o calf abeawt th' boindin o my history book, — we may caw it “full calf”, indeed—“roof calf”, —un unadornt.

My name's Jethro Bobbintup. It's not a pratty name, is it? It doesn't say mitch for th' taste uv oather my fayther or my mother that they should caw me Jethro. Why couldn't they, eawt oth greight hillock o names ut have bin invented to tell one member uv a family fro another, ha poiked eawt for me a prattler name than Jethro?” Aw'd no

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cheice ith matter; when aw wur kestnut, eawr foak considert me too yung to give an opinion as to wot wur pratty, or wot wur feaw, wot wur for my good, or wot for my hurt; wot would be ornimental for me, or wot wouldn't. So, beein denied th' poor privilege o choosin my own name, on th' greawnd that my judgment wurnt roipe enoof, un that aw wur too mitch interested ith matter to give an impershul decision, aw had to content myself—not wi keepin my meawth shut, un my lungs unexercoised—now, for aw believe when th' peawson inquired wot name this choilt wur to be cawd, un my fayther said Jethro, aw oppent my gills as woide

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as th' church dur, un skroiked as if he'd gotten a pin in his geawn sleeve, un it wur runnin into me unmercifully. Awve not a very clear recollechun oth kestnin ceremony; but aw think this skroikin met be intended as a protest ogen havin yoked to me sitch a comical name as Jethro.

Aw dunnot think Bobbintup's a very pratty name oather. At any rate, its not uv a classic mould, nor would it seawnd weel among th' harristokracy. Lord Bobbintup wouldn't frizz ut aw. No mon ut had sitch a toitle would be considert to be at th' top oth harristocratick tree; he'd be taen rayther for one uv its lowest un pousiest branches. There's a good deal in a name. Billy Shakespear makes Juliet say, "wot's in a name?" – un to declare that "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Un that may be true as far as it gooas. But roses un men are two very different things. No mon would tak Lord Bobbintup to be as grand an aristocrat as Lord Heriot Avondale. Lord Bobbintup would be taen to belong to th' same harristocratick grade as Bombastos Furioso –an object to lowf at, not to reverence un respect. Awm supproised, then, that my fayther should ha stuck to Bobbintup. He wonst had th' choance o gettin shut on't, for he went to America, un wur there six yer. Why he didn't swop his name for a noicer thrutches aw th' gawmin peawr eawt o my comprehenshun. It shows, at any rate, that he'd a noshun as firmly rooted in him, as any owd oak tree is in English seighl, that it wur never intended by owd Mother Fate that he should get his clugs eawt oth slutch uv

poverty un very low estate. Booath him un my mam mut ha believed theirsels to be made oth commonest o clay, summat loike wot they make those mess-pots on ut werkheawse childer use for their porritch. If ever awve th' choance, aw'll swop booath

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o my names for a couple ut seawnd as if beein amung poor foak, aw wur cleon eawt o my element. It's one o my doctrines that no mon should grumble at not beein heur up on th' ladder o loife if he's a very common name, un doesn't feel brunnin, loike th' feighurs uv a forge, under his senglet, a desoire to be known ith world by some prattier-seawndin, un mooar harristocractic apellashun.

But then, wot's th' use o me tawkin, when, praps, awve not gumpshun enoof to give an opinion wuth herknin to? When aw wur but a lad, eawr foak said aw'd a soft place i' my yed; un its generally thowt neaw, by those ut know me, that awm not, ith matter o sense, wot they cawn quite up to th' knocker. A yung woman ut aw could loike to ha gotten very thick wi said hoo'd nobbut one objecshun to me, un that wur that aw'd not as mitch guts i' my brains as would qualify me to tell th' difference between twice foive un twenty un twice twenty-foive. Uv course, when aw yerd wot hoo'd said, aw took greight pains to let hur know that aw wurnt sitch a babby-yed as hoo took me to be, for aw could persave clearly enoof that twice foive un twenty un twice twenty-foive coom so nearly to th' same total, that there wur no fracshun known ut could describe th' difference. But at this proof o my wisdom th' frizzlegig lowft, said aw'd proved mysel to be th' thickyed ut hoo'd taen me to be, un sent me word, for my informashun, hoo said, that twice foive un twenty wur nobbut tharty, whoile twice twenty-foive wur fifty. Well, that showed to me hoo wur th' thick-yed; un aw as aw hope is, that where th' gross derkness prevails there may, afore lung, be substituted clear leet; un that this yung woman – Sayroh Shabashee is hur name – who think's that aw dunnot reich up th' fust panel,

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let alone to th' knocker, may come to see that awm aiqil to th' full meashurs oth dur.

Some foak believe that in every village, heawever smaw, there's sure t' be a foo; its as natural, they sayn, as that there should be black currans as weel as green gooseberries. Aw think when aw wur a lad a deol o foak took me t' be th' foo ov eawr village, un they leet me howd th' post uv honour for a very long toime, which proved two things – that they'd a deol o confidence in my abilities for th' posishun, un a lerge bakin o charity, uv a certain quality. Aw'll just tell yoa heaw aw geet fitted when aw wur i' my fourteen yer, un then yoa may judge fur yoarsels, un sell yoar opinions ut after for wot they'll fot i'th merkit where there's a demand for sitch herticles.

Till aw wurnt tharteen awd as foine a set o teeth as ever crackt a nut; they could groind owt into mummy, fro a steel baw to a scrap o teawse-weawse. My fayther un mother used me for a pair o nutcrackers whenever they bowt a toothrey Bercilonis. It saved um layin eawt their money on sitch herticles, un provided um wi' opportunities for givin me a trayt, for th' crackin oth nuts wur awlus reckont t' be my share, un a good share too it wur, for aw wur awlus stawd th' fast. But at th' age ut aw've bin speighkin on, aw had to give up this luxury. One o my double teeth turnt rebel, un defied me to use it any lunger for crackin nuts. It wur an okkipashun that it had gotten teighurt on. It begun to wertch, noicely at th' fust, as if it meant to gie me just a gentle hint that though it hadn't any objecshun to serve me, its lawful mestur, by helpin to chew my meight, it had a distate to serviv other foak, un that it would be as weel if awd let eveybuddy ut wanted t' enjeigh a feed o nut kernils crack their own shells.

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But in a whoile summat angert it, aw reckon, un then it seet to a wertchin as if it wur i' awfully good yernest, un never intended to stop any mooar. It gien me no rest oather by neet or by day; it kept leatherin at it –wertch, wertch, un then lutch, lutch, lutch; un if aw tried it wi owt werm it took th' same sort uv a fit. If aw hawsed t' chew owt, then it rattled at its wertchin till aw skroiked, un howded my jaw as if aw wur feart on it beein writhen eawt oth socket. Un, my stars! wot an effect it had on my temper; aw geet as

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nattle as a dug wi sore toes; aw couldn't boide anybuddy t' speighl t' me; un those ut lookt to me for a civil onswer to any o their questions went away disapeighnted, un sayin it wur a pity but my tooth would wertch herder by th' hawve. There wur a little bit o comfort i' knowin that that wur impossible. One neet, heaweever, it showed that aw wur mistaen, for it lutcht un lutcht till aw thowt it wur gooin t' lift my yed cleon off my shilders; un it drove me to sitch a pitch o distracshun that aw seet to a jowin my yed ogen th' chimbley jaum. My mother wur terrified, geet howd on me, un pood me away; hoo wur feort that aw should dash eawt my brains. But my fayther clamt deawn hur terror by asshurin hur that it wur quite impossible to dash brains eawt uv a yed in which there'd never bin any. It wur consolin to me as weel, wur that, yoa may be shure. After this my fayther gien me some advice, wi an assurance sticht to it that if aw didn't tak it aw should be plagued wi my rebellious groinder as long as aw lived. He said if aw acted loike a lad uz had some sense aw should goo to Berber Tummus – who, in addishun to shavin un powin foak, drawd their teeth, made un mented numberells, sod red bottle, black plaisters, green

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sawve, yure-eighl, diet drink, blackin, un pop – un get him to operate uppo th' tooth wi' his pinchers. Aw towd my fayther it wur very noice givin advice, but when it coom to lettin Berber Tummus torture yoa within an inch o yoar loife, as aw'd yerd he'd done monny a one, it wur quite another thing. His onswer wur that aw wur a stupid cubyed, un had proved wost mooar that aw'd a soft place i' my yed.

Whoile he wur thus daubin me o'er his compliments, a chap coom in ut went by th' name o Spoider-legg'd Isaac, un, on gettin an inklin oth state uv affairs, he towd my fayther t' not be so rash, for it wur not at aw unloikely that my tooth wanted some other tratment besoides drawin. He didn't approve o yung foaks havein their teeth poo'd eawt; it went ogen their health un speighlt their beauty. Very loikely it did, said my fayther; but if ever it speighls that lad's beauty aw'll fly up tort th' sky wi' th' lerks, un sing as herd un as gaily as them wi astonishment. Aw thowt Isaac tawkt loike a sensible

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chap, un so aw asht him wot mack o trayment he advised me t' tak to. He recommended me to a chap ut, ever sin aw could remember, had had a greight name for cliverness. He wur wot's cawd a bottanist, un could tell th' name uv every plant, shrub, blade, un yerb, fro a porato-woizel to a sunfleawer or a Merriky joolip. When he descroibed hissel he wur too modest to tak' th' name uv doctor, un too preawd to caw hissel he wur too preawd to caw hissel a quack: so he said he wur a culler o simples. If he'd said he wur a guller o thoose ut wur afflicted wi th' simples he'd ha bin nar th' merk. He gulled me, un noicely too. He thowt praps he wur helpin his friends and nayburs to carry eawt a foine joke; but when him and me stood soide by soide there wur two foak i' company ut couldn't agree i'th truth o that opinion.

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Th' name o this chap wur Zebulun Grundy; but he wur mooar generally cawd Owd Cammomie. Not knowin as mitch abeawt him as aw know neaw, for th' want uv experience, aw didn't need mitch persuadin to goo un give his skill a trial, because there seemt to be a pleasant prospect o beein browt eawt o my misery witheawt resoortin to that desperate remedy to be met wi at Berber Tummus's. As soon as awd towd Zebulun my tale he towd me t' keawr me deawn on a cheor un oppen my meawth as woidely as th' hinges would allow, un when aw'd done so he put a glass to one uv his een, summat loike wot watch-menders use when they're examinin th' bowels uv a patent layver.

“Oh”, he says, “aw see wot ails thy tooth, lad; it needs no drawin. Aw'll gie thee some stuff ut ull put it to reets afore th' cock crows i' th mornin. It's wot we caw th' tinctur o caps-eye-cum. Theaw mun get a dob on thy finger un rub thy gums weel wi it, un then stond wi thy meawth oppen facin th' feighur for abeawt five minnits, un if th' pain doesn't leov thee i'th course uv an heawr theaw mun rub on thy gums another dob.”

He gien me a little bottleful oth stuff, not mitch bigger, awm shure, than a doll's thimble, for which he cherged me sixpence. Then aw went whoam, un towd eawr foaks wot aw had to do. My moather accordinly sturred th' feighur up, so that, when aw coom

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to oppen my meawth, aw should feel as mitch yet as possible fro it. Full o hope that aw wur gooin to get rid uv a thungin torment, aw geet a good dob oth stuff on to my finger, un rubbd it on to my gums oerant my wertchin tooth. But awd no sooner gotten it fairly on than my meawth wur filled wi a brunnin sensashun sitch as aw cannot descroibe; my

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een filled wi tears, which rolled deawn my cheeks; aw clencht my honds, un seet to a doancin as if aw wur gooin mad.

“Ello! ello!” cried my fayther, “theaw doesn’t seem to loike it!”

“Oh, murder!” aw says, “its hotter than feighur; un awve swallowed some on’t, un its scorchin my throttle un brunnin my innurts aw to tinder. Oh, get me some cowl watter; oh do, do, do get me some cowl watter. Awm on feighur!”

“Theaw’rt noane on feighur, not thee, indeed,” said my fayther. “Aw good remedies tak keen howd oth place affected. Have a bit o payshunce, lad, un dunnot stamp un doance abeawt o that road.”

“Put a dob i’ yoar meawth,” aw says, “un see wheere yoar payshunce ull be. Oh, if yoa dunnot reich we some cowl watter awst dee. Awm on feighur, fayther; awm on feighur.”

Heere aw went doancin into th’ scullery, un seein a mugful a watter upo th’ slopstone, wtheawt axin any questions or givin any wernin, aw dasht my yed into ‘t, but nobbut to make ill wuss. It wur a mixtur o washin liquor un watter which my mother had gotten ready to cleon th’ reawm floors wi; un as it geet i’ my een un meawth it made me feel as if aw wur i’th bottomless pit, un wur undergoin one oth wust tortures oth damned. Aw doanced abeawt herder by th’ hawve, un skroiked as if there’n killin me. My fayther, who by this time had gotten roused, drawd a two-uert canful o watter un dasht it on to my yed; then he sent another i’ my chops; un aw took off into th’ lone, doancin un utterin aw sorts o skroikes. My fayther un mother woiped me deawn gently wi a soft cloth, whoile my fayther leet me sup as mitch cowl watter as

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aw loiked. In abeawt a quarter uv an heawr th' brunnin sensashun begun to leov me, un by degrees it went away; un aw mun say that th' toothwertch went wi it; un when awd gotten wot one met caw noicely reawnd, aw crope off to bed un slept seawndly till mornin.

For abeawt a month ut after this stur my tooth behaved itsel pratty weel. Aw begun to think that th' caps-eye-cum had done its werk grandly, if but roofly, un that my tooth had gotten put on its best behaviour ogen. But th' breetest o hopes are often doomed to sudden deoth, loike th' best o' men used to be to th' mertyr's stake. One forenoon, as aw wur whistlin a merry tune, un pushin on wi my werk, th' wertchin sterted ogen, wi a lutch which coom as sudden as gun-shot, un cut my tune as short as if somebuddy had cumn behaind me un stuck a peg i' my whistle-poipe. Eawr foak could see, when aw took my seot at th' dinner table, that aw wur eawt o flunter ogen, for there wur beefstake dumplings to th' dinner, un aw tackled my share as if awd bin havin a fierce quarrel wi', un had gotten a stupid hatred for, aw th' puddin breed. Aw explaint that my peevish owd fang had sterted uv its capers ogen, just as badly as ever. My fayther axt me if aw hadn't better t' give th' caps-eye-um another trial, but aw said now, awd ha no fur truck wi that cruel, feighbury stuff if aw th' teeth i' my yed sterted o' wertchin, un swelled my face up till foak couldn't see whether awd gotten a nose which, my fayther said, would be a swellin indeed, for when noses wur gien eawt aw stood ith front rank, un wur in hee favvur wi th' distriibitor.

At th' lung length aw made up my moind, after a bit o persuashun, un an assurance fro my mother that there wur no cure for my afflicshun but a pair o tooth-drawers, that awd goo

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to Berger Tummus's, un engage him t' gie me th' benefit uv his best skill. My fayther said that wur a sensible resolve, for he wur shure, as weel as my mother, that aw should ne'er get rid oth wertchin till aw could see th' roots oth nazzy owd tooth.

Aw cannot say, heawever, that aw went gaily to Tummus's; as near as aw con fancy, aw went wi a feelin summat akin to that wi which a chap would merch to th' gallows when he had to play th' leodin pert ith tragedy. For when aw geet to Tummus's dur, my gert failt me, a sort uv mist coom before my een, that lookt as it it wur made o scales off th' back uv a yerrin, un aw broke eawt into a swat. So aw mercht on for abeawt twenty yerds, un then aw turnt back; but when aw geet wonst mooar to th' shop dur, my courage wur not still strung enoof to get me insoide. For abeawt ten minnits aw dilly-dallied abeawt, un then, makin one grand screw up o my courage, aw banged into th' shop wi a kind uv a rush, just as a mon would bang at his throat wi a razzur when he'd gotten th' steom uv his resolve up to commit shooiside. Berber Tummus wur in th' operatin reawm behaind, but on yerrin footsteps in his shop, he coom to th' dur, un when aw twod him th' naytur o my errand, he said, - "Step this way, please;" un step that way aw did, un fun that he wur just on th' peighnt o operatin uppo one oth rebellious teeth oth Boots at th' village inn; un that there wur two yung wimmin waitin to be accommodated after th' same fashun. Aw kornt say uz aw felt that it would be oather pleasant or comfortable to keawr there waitin o my turn, watchin Tummus wroithe these foak's teeth eawt o their jaws, un a desoided feelin o funkiness stole very sherply o'er me. Heawever, aw thowt, by gow aw'll be herd; aw'll see th' fust performance any heaw; un before my resolve wur fairly taen,

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Tummus had his instrument ith meawth uv his payshunt, un, wi a sudden twist uv his arm, he gien a moighty wrench, th' drawers slipt off th' tooth, un he flew wi his back ogen th' waw. Th' boots fot up one o the mooast unearthly skroikers that ever cut its way through my nervous system, un chilled my blood; then jumpt off th' cheor, for Tummus a stingin pur wi his clug o'er th' bally, sent th' spittoon into th' asshole, un aw

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th' sawdust flyin abeawt, some on to me, some on to Sammul, un some on to th' wimmin; un then, as if he wur seized wi a fit o sterk-starin, malignant madness, he aimt a pur at me, but missed, un smashed in one oth drawers astid. Then, loike a wild beost, he chased aw th' lot on us reawnd th' place, a table ith middle luckily enablin us to dodge him. Th' wimmin skroiked loike jays; Tummus cussed un howded his honds to his bally, un aw made a neighse as if aw wur trin t' escape fro an infuriated policeman. Un th' wurst on't wur, th' dur wur shut, un th' Boots wur too sherp on to us to give us a choance o oppenin it. After gooin reawnd the place, pell-mell, heawever, for abeawt six toimes, Tummus twicht th' dur oppen, un eawt wi aw flew. But heere there wur another obstacle. Tummus had a heck dur to his front entrance, un awd latcht it after me. There wur no toime for hesitashun or thowt; aw set my honds on to it, un beawnded o'er it loike a scopprill; then, as sherp as leetnin welly, aw unsneckt th' latch, un eawt rusht th' wimmin, un Tummus at their heels, who, luckily, as he bolted eawt oth opeartin reawm, poo'd a cheor into th' durway, un th' Boots run ogen it, un went dawn. Aw neer stopt to see th' eend o this mad hunt, but run whoam, banged into th' heawse, shut th' dur after me un lockt it, un then gloort throof th' window, to see if aw wur still pursued. To my greight

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relief aw wurnt, though a ruck o foak stood starin, as if theyr'n wonderin wot the ferrups wur up. My mother wur taen fearfully aback, but aw soon explaint th' cause o my sudden un hasty rush into th' heawse, vowin at th' same toime that if ever aw had a tooth drawn, Berber Tummus wur not th' chap ut mut do th' job.

Awd forgotten my tooth aw this whoile, but neaw when aw coom to my direct attentshun to it, aw fun that it had gien o'er wertchin. It had gotten feort, as weel as me; un, seeminly, dreadin to be put to th' same inflicshun as that oth Boots, it had resolved to behave itsel, un get on good terms wi me ogen.

For some time after this stur aw wur happily free fro pain; aw my teeth behaved theirsels loike good teeth owt to do, only aw wur very careful not to chew on that soide

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where th' wertchin had bin. It begun to be my gradely firm opinion that, after aw, th' best cure for th' toothwercth, wur a good feorin – a regilur fust-rate shick oth nervous system, un aw gien that opinion to lots o foak ut complaint oth misbehaviour o their groinders. But, heaweever, this awm sorry to say, wurnt an opinion that had th' merit o lastin for ever. It wurnt loike a deol uv opinions that are floatin abeawt ith world – it hadn't prejudice oather for a back set, or a foundashun, nor had bigotry owt to do wi keepin it on its legs aloive un flourishin. My peevisch owd tooth sterted o wertchin ogen one day just as badly, if not wuss, than ever; it took me off booath eitin, sleepin, wawkin, sittin, tawkin, or howdin my din; un it wur as near ruinatin my temper as maes no matter. Aw geet th' gaffer oth shop where aw wertch to examine it. He wur reckont to be a chap ut know'd a foine seet mooar than any uv his nayburs – ut had, in fact, forgotten mooar than th' bulk on um ever know'd.

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He proneawnced it to be a thorough bad un, un said it wur no use tryin oather drugs or chermes, or any other meons but that furnished by a pair o tooth-drawers; un, after a bit o persuashun, aw agreed to goo to a druggist cawd Soilas Yetton, who, he said, wur a dab hond ut extractin aw sitch good-for-nuthin tormentors.

Aw mun confess, heaweever, that wi a keen remembrance o wot took place at Berber Tummus's, aw went to Soilas's shop, wi my hert a deol nearer my shoon than my breast boan; un afore aw venturt to goo in, aw took th' stock uv aw ut he had in his window. At last, heaweever, my tooth gien a most infernal lutch, as mitch as to say, "Wot does t' stond there, shilly-shallin, for? Ger off into th' shop wi thee, un let Soilas gie thee comfort;" un so aw rusht in, screwin, as herd as ever aw wur able, th' pegs o my courage, to keep um fro slippin un lettin deawn my resolushun.

Soilas took me into a little reawm behaind his shop, un seet me on a cheor, un towd me t' oppen my meawth, which aw did, feelin awfully uncomfortable though. He then, whoile aw thowt he wur but frimblin abeawt my tooth to feel if it wur lose, slipt his instrument on to it, un gien a wrench which lifted me reet up, un sent me slap wi my yed

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ogen th' chimbley jawm, th' drawers sliipin off. By gow, heaw aw skroiked, un if there'd bin a knoife abeawt awm shure aw should ha sassinated him.

“Come, come,” he says, “dunno mak that neighse, th' foak ut are passin ull think awm takkin somebuddy's loife.”

“Well, hang it,” aw cried, “welly pooin a chap's yed off his shilders is th' next dur to killin him.”

“Oh,” he says, “it was a bit uv a slip, that's aw; we'n

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monny such. Tak th' cheor ogen; theawst see, aw'll manish it next toime.”

“A bit uv a slip!” aw says. “By jing, aw wonder wot a gradely full slip would be, then. Yoan very near knockt my brains eawt, un gien me as mitch pain i' two minnits as owt to serve for a loifetoime.”

Wi a bit o coaxin, he geet me to keawr me deawn ogen, un let him have another gurd, un, to my greight relief, he wur successful—eawt coom th' merciless owd termentor, wi fangs welly lung enoof to make a pair o hafts for a penknoife. He cherged me sixpence for th' job, un whether he wur weel paid or not, awst awlus be satisfied, as lung as we live, that aw wur. Aw geet ten toimes mooar for sixpence than ever aw could loike t' have ogen for a suvverin.