THE EVENING NEWS.

Friday, ... March 1, 1872.

AN HOUR OF AGONY.

Has the reader ever had a tussle with a Bengal tiger in full vigor and appetite? Has it chanced him to be in a balloon when perforated by Prussian bullets? Has it occurred to him to have been indulging a commendable curiosity in the remote recess of a coal mine, when an explosion suddenly severed the connection between himself and the outer world? These are forms of uneasiness not to be lightly treated of. They shrink into nothing beside that supreme commingling of grief, astonishment, and horror it was my lot to experience on a certain never-to be-forgotten evening of January, 'forty-nine.

Time's soothing influence has wrought its accustomed effect. All bitterness, all self-reproach, have died gradually away. In place of that mental tumult which, for a long period, attended the remembrance of the incident in question, I now find myself able to narrate with indifference, nay, even with a smile, the circumstances to which but recently my most intimate friends durst hardly hazard an allusion.

The Guild of Lumpeters represents one of the most ancient and honored of London's civic institutions. What they are, why they are, I have not the remotest idea. Enough that, on a certain day in November, they are seen in their glory, their manners brighter, their hands brassier, their knights more corpulent, themselves sleeker and more redolent of wealth than any of their prosperous rivals. They have a hall solely, it would seem, for the purpose of hospitality, they give dinners of inconceivable succulency and toothsomeness. They invite Mayors, nay Kings, who don't always come, and Princes, who generally do, and they also invite me. I go, for I like them. All the Lumpeters of my acquaintance are noble, large-hearted men, citizen gentlemen, on whom London, in need of arm and purse, might confidently rely. I think if I were other than what I am, I would be a Lumpeter.

Pretexts were never wanting for a Lumpeter feed. The recovery of the chief city magistrate from a bilious attack, the breaking up of the frost, the birth of a son and heir to the Ban of Croatia, arrival of a piebald elephant at the gardens of the Zoological Society, such were among the events I could recall as having suggested feastful rejoicings. But that to which I have now to refer was to be regarded as a private and peculiar gathering, almost in point of fact, a corporate family feed, comprising no more than ninety-five guests, selected with discrimination for the purpose of testing the merits of a new head cook. Thus it had rather the nature of a grave and dispassionate deliberation than of a dinner, a certain sense of responsibility toning down the exuberant mirth that usually waited on these pleasant assemblies.

There were to be no speeches, no music. The usual loyal toasts no more. Above all, no ladies. The presence of beauty, chatting in the gallery, might haply distract the attention of the weaker sex from the great object of the meeting.

The Lumpeters were particular, and I thought conservative—in matters of attire. They themselves, to a man, adhere to the fashion, moribund, but not defunct, of ankle-buttoned pantaloons, figured silk stockings, buckled shoes, expensive white waistcoats and the mighty cravat patronized by his late Majesty, the fourth George. It was well understood that the adoption of a similar costume on the part of their guests would be interpreted by Lumpeters as the most delicate return that could be offered for their hospitality. I myself invariably sported the fancy dress in question.

On the eventful day I have mentioned, it happened that I had been detained at chambers later than usual, and on reaching home had barely time to dress. While doing so I received an anxious message from a friend who was to have accompanied me to the banquet, but who, being late and himself a stranger to the guild, begged me to secure for him a seat next my own.

With increased expedition I finished my toilet, and the dining hall being but five minutes, walk from my residence, I quickly buttoned on a pair of rough overalls, threw on my cloak, and hurried to the spot.

To my astonishment a crowd, dense and still augmenting, was gathered about the door. It was only through the aid of a friendly policeman that I was enabled to make my way. "What was the matter?" I inquired of number Nineteen B. The answer, half drowned in the clatter of arriving carriages, sounded something like "furrin swell." "Who?" Number Nineteen forebore to trust his lips with the name; but it was him as kills the beasteses out in Afrikey. It was a more intelligent porter that announced to me that the French lion slayer, the Bar on Bobadill de Bete Fauve, had, at the last moment, accepted an invitation to dine at Lumpeters' Hall.

The character of the assembly had undergone a change. Not only had a little reinforcement of a hundred and twenty guests been hastily invited, but a dense mass of spectators lined the hall, the passages and into the banqueting room itself, the spacious gallery of which was already filled with ladies, whom the chivalrous guild had found it impossible to dream of excluding.

I was late; but dinner had been deferred half an hour. There would be just time to rush into the room, secure my friend's seat, and then deposit my cloak and overalls in the room devoted to such purposes.

The former matter was quickly arranged, and I was darting back, when I was met by a rush and pressure that almost forced me behind an adjacent screen. The Baron de Bete Fauve had arrived, and was being triumphantly marched into the hall.

The Baron de Bobadil de Bete Fauve, when visible, proved to be a remarkably small gentleman, with intensely black eyes and moustaches, the latter curling fiercely up almost into the former; but my own situation demanded all my attention. Withdraw I could not. To sit down in that highly attired society in light brown overalls, such as might be worn by a stableman, was not to be thought of. Ah! an idea. Just within the door, near the wall, but with space to get behind it, stood the large screen against which I had been pressed. Capturing a waiter, I drew him with me into that friendly shelter.

"Here, help, my man. Can't get back. Just let me slip off these confounded—hurry, now——" I gasped, and tore the buttons loose with lightning speed.

To be continued.

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