FRITH WILLIAM POWELL

JOHN LEECH, HIS LIFE AND WORK. VOL. 1 [OF 2]

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Содержание

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PREFACE

I am very conscious of the many sins of commission and omission of which I have been guilty in my attempt to write the "Life and Work of John Leech"; but, that ingratitude may not figure amongst my shortcomings, I take advantage of the usual preface to acknowledge my obligations to friends and strangers from whom I have received assistance, and to express my warmest thanks for their kindness.

The time that has elapsed since Leech's death has terribly thinned the ranks of his friends and contemporaries; but the leveller has spared and dealt tenderly with one of his earliest and most constant friends, Mr. Charles F. Adams, whose store of Leech's letters, together with many pleasing reminiscences, have been placed unreservedly at my disposal. From Mr. Kitton's memoir of Leech I have derived, through the author's kindness, much advantage; and to Mr. Thornber, a well-known collector of Leech's works, I owe the opportunity of selecting some of the best illustrations that grace the book.

I also desire to express my gratitude to the proprietors of *Punch*, who, though unable to comply with my unreasonable demand to the full extent of it, have given me most important help in my endeavours to do honour to the genius who was such an honour to *Punch*. I owe to those gentlemen no less than eight of the full-page illustrations, to say nothing of numbers of small cuts.

I take this opportunity of thanking Mr. Grego, my neighbour Mr. McKenzie, Mr. Willert Beale, and Mr. Maitland for their help in various ways; not forgetting the Eton boy, whose anonymity I preserve according to his desire.

To Sir John Millais, Mr. Ashby Sterry, Mr. Horsley, Mr. Holman Hunt, and Mr. Cholmondeley Pennel I also offer my warmest acknowledgment for the papers they have so kindly contributed.

In conclusion, I permit myself a few words in explanation of that which I know will be laid to my charge, namely, that my book tells too little of Leech and too much of his work, and that it is chronologically deficient. In excuse I plead that the life of Leech as I knew it from its early days was, like that of most artists, entirely devoid of such incidents as would interest the public; and that from the difficulty of acquiring certain information, and the varying times at which it was supplied, chronological accuracy was impossible.

PROLOGUE

"'Leech' (spelt 'leich') is an old Saxon word for 'surgeon,'" writes a friend to me. "Hence, as you know, the employment of the word 'leech' as a term applied in former times to doctors."

Though Leech is not a common name, I have met with several bearers of it under every variety of spelling that the word was capable of – Leech, Lietch, Leich, Leeche, Leitch, etc. Only two of the owners of these names became known to fame – John, of immortal memory, and, longo intervallo, William Leitch, a Scottish artist, and landscape-painter of considerable merit, whose pictures, generally of a classic character, found favour amongst a certain class of buyers. A large subject of much beauty was engraved, and, I think, formed the prize-engraving for the year for the Art Union of London. I have no doubt William Leitch was frequently asked if he were related to John. The sound of the names was similar, and few inquirers knew of the difference in the spelling. Whether William was asked the question or not I cannot speak to with certainty; but that John was I am sure, because he told me so himself, and, as well as I can recall them, in the following words:

"I was asked the other day if I were related to a man of the same name – a Scotchman – a landscape-painter. He spells his name L-e-i-t-c-h, you know. I said, 'No; the Scotch gentleman's name is spelt in the Scotch way, with the 'itch in it.' Not bad, eh?

I hope nobody will tell him!"

I met William Leitch several times (he died long ago), and was always charmed by his refined and gentle manner; but we never became intimate, so I cannot say I had the following anecdote from himself; but it was told me by an intimate friend of the artist, who assured me that he had it from Leitch direct.

Leitch had a considerable practice as a drawing-master, chiefly amongst the higher classes. He taught the very highest, for he gave lessons to the Queen herself. I have never had the honour of seeing any of her Majesty's drawings, but I have had the advantage of her criticism, and I can well believe in the reports of the excellence of her work.

The story goes that one day, in the course of a lesson, the Queen let her pencil fall to the ground. Both master and pupil stooped to pick it up; and, to the horror of Leitch, there was a collision – the master's head struck that of his royal pupil! and before he could stammer an apology, the Queen said, smiling:

"Well, Mr. Leitch, if we bring our heads together in this way, I ought to improve rapidly."

CHAPTER I
EARLY DAYS

On the 29th of August, 1817, a boy was born in London gifted with a genius which, in the short time allowed for its development, delighted and astonished the world. The child's name was Leech, and he was christened John. The Leech family was of Irish extraction. From information received, it appears that the father of Leech, also called John, was possessed of an uncle who had made a large fortune as the owner of the London Coffee-House, Ludgate Hill. With this fortune he retired, leaving his nephew to reign in his stead at the Coffee-House, not without a reasonable hope and expectation that the nephew would follow in the uncle's prosperous footsteps. But times had changed. Clubs were being formed, and the customers of the Ludgate Hill place of entertainment preferred to be enrolled as members of the novel institutions rather than subject themselves to the somewhat mixed company at the Coffee-House. Leech's establishment, however, struggled on into my early time, for I can well remember being advised, if I wished for a good and wonderfully cheap dinner, consisting – as per advertisement – of quite startling varieties of dishes, my desire might be gratified by payment of eighteen-pence to the authorities at the London Coffee-House, Ludgate Hill.

I do not know the precise time at which the doors of the Coffee-House were finally closed and the father Leech, with his large family, was thrown upon the world; but it must have been some years after the subject of this memoir had been enrolled amongst the Charterhouse scholars, an event that took place when he was seven years old. Previous to this by about four years, some feeble buds of the genius that blossomed so abundantly afterwards are said to have shown themselves, and to have been observed by Flaxman as the child sat with pencil and paper on his mother's knee. The great sculptor is reported to have said:

"This drawing is wonderful. Do not let him be cramped by drawing-lessons; let his genius follow its own bent. He will astonish the world."

I venture to think that for this story a grain of salt would be by no means sufficient. No drawing done by a child of three years old, however gifted, could be "wonderful" in the estimation of Flaxman; and that such an artist as he was should have said anything so foolish as what is tantamount to advising a parent against "learning to draw" I take the liberty of disbelieving. Flaxman was a friend of the Leeches, and in after years, while John Leech was still a youth, the sculptor again examined some of his sketches, and, after looking well at them, he very likely said, as is reported:

"That boy must be an artist; he will be nothing else."

A child of seven seems almost cruelly young to be subjected to the hardships of a public school.

"I thought," wrote John's father, "that I was not wrong in sending him thus early, as Dr. Russell, the head-master, had a son of the same age in the school, and John was in the same form with him."

No doubt the elder Leech felt much the parting from his little son, but to Mrs. Leech the boy's leaving home was a severe blow; the mother's heart would no doubt realize and exaggerate the perils to mind and body arising from contact with something like six hundred fellow-pupils, scarcely one so young, and none so loving and lovable as her little boy. John was boarded at a house close by the Charterhouse, and only allowed to go home at rare intervals. The fond mother, however, could not live without seeing him, and to enable her to gratify her longing, a room was hired in a house overlooking the boy's playground, from which, carefully hidden, she could see her little son as he walked and talked with the form-fellow, "the particular friend" to whom a sympathetic nature had attached him; or watch him as he joined heart and soul in some game – not too rough – for a fall from his pony, by which his arm had been broken and was still far from strong, made such rough sports as are common to schoolboys too dangerous to be indulged in.

The Charterhouse rejoiced in a drawing-master named Burgess. Upon what principles that master proceeded to train the youth of Charterhouse I am unable to speak; they were most likely those in vogue at the time of young Leech's sojourn. If they were of that description, it was fortunate that Leech paid –

as is said – little or no attention to them, finding a difficulty, no doubt, in applying them to the sketches that constantly fell from him on to the pages of his school-books.

It may be urged that when Flaxman warned the boy's mother against teaching as being sure to cramp her son's genius, he alluded to the Burgess method. That may have been so. But a man like Flaxman, who had possessed himself by severest study as a young man of the means by which his powers were developed, would, I think, have been sure to warn Mrs. Leech of the difference between the teaching that would be mischievous, and that which is proved to be indispensable by the universal practice of the greatest painters. I am aware I shall be confronted with the case of John Leech, who was, so to speak, entirely self-taught; but Leech was not a painter, and certainly never could have become a good one without training; besides, he was altogether exceptional – unique, in fact. In my opinion, we are as likely to see another Shakespeare or Dickens as another Leech.

This is a digression, for which I apologize. I cannot find that my hero – I may call him such, for he was ever a hero to me – paid much attention to classical knowledge. Latin verses were impossible to him, but they had to be done; so, as he said, he "got somebody to do them for him." In spite of his weak arm, he fenced with Angelo, the school fencing-master; but, beyond the advantage of the exercise, the accomplishment was of no use to him.

Here I cannot resist an anecdote of which the fencing reminds

me.

Some years before Leech's death the editor of a newspaper, who was remarkable for the severity of his criticisms and for his extreme personal ugliness, had made some caustic remarks on Leech's work in general, and on some special drawings in particular.

"If that chap," said Leech to me, "doesn't mind what he is about, I will *draw* and defend myself" – an idle threat, for nothing could have provoked that gentle, noble nature into personality, no trace of which is to be found in the long list of his admirable works.

Several letters, delightfully boyish, written by Leech to his father from the Charterhouse, are in my possession. Some of them, I think, may appropriately appear in this place.

"Septr 19 1826

"Dear Papa

"I hope you are quite well. I beg you will let me come out to see you for I am so dull here, and I am always fretting about, because I wrote to you yesterday and you would not let me come out. I will fag hard if you will let me come out, and will you write to me, and the letter that you write put in when you are going to Esex and when you return for I want to very particularly

"How is Mamma, Brother and Sisters

"I hope Ester is quite well,

"Your affectionate"Son
"J Leech

"I am very sorry that I stayed away from School with – but I promise never to do it again and I beg you will let me come out on Sunday."

"Charter House October 2 1826

"My dear Papa.

"You told me to write to you when the reports where made out, they are made out now, and mine is, does his Best. I hope you are quite well, and Mamma the same. I hope Tom Mary Caroline, and Ester are quite well. I have not spoken to Mr Chapman yet about the tuter, and drawing Master, because I had not an oppertunity, send me a cake as soon as it is convenient

"Your affectionate son
"J Leech."
[No date.]

"My dear Papa.

"I write this note to know how poor little Polly is I hope she is better to day pray write to me before the day is over and tell me how she is. I hope you and Mamma Tom and Fanny are all well since I left you last night.

"I am happy to say I am at the very top off the Form

"Tell Mamma not to forget to come and see me on Wenesday as she said she would. I would write to Polly now only I have not time pray give Polly a 1000 kiss for me and Fanny and Tom the

same. As I said before I hope poor little Polly is better.

"Your affectionate
"Son
"J Leech."

"My Dear Papa,

"My report was made out yesterday but I forgot to write to you therefore I tell you to-day, it was (generally attentive) If any afternoon or morning that you have time I should be very happy to see you. You can see me in the morning from 12 to half-past two and in the evening from 4 till 9.

"Send me another suit of clothes if you please and a cap. Mind the gloves. I hope Polly continues to get better and I hope you and Mamma Brother and sisters are quite well. Send me a penknife if you please. I remain

"Your affectionate
"Son
"J Leech."

"Dear Papa

"Will you let me come out to see you once before my sisters go to school, for I feel quite unhappy here and miserable. I am afraid I shall not be able to get promoted yet, therefore I am afraid I shant be able to come out. But you promised me that if I did not get promoted you would let me come out. I try as much as I can to get promoted. Do let me come out once before my Sisters go to School.

"Your affectionate
"Son
"J Leech

"Tell Mamma to send me a cake as soon as she can
"Send me some money as soon as you can."

"September 14 1827

"My Dear Papa.

"I am happy to say that Mr Baliscombe says that for my Holiday Task I deserve promotion and says it is very well done indeed. Come and see me as soon as you can. I think I shall get promoted when Dr Russell sees my Holiday Task – In fact Mr Baliscombe is going to ask him to put me up. I hope you and Mamma are quite well. Springett went to the play he tells me and did not come back till the morning. I hope dear old Camello and the dear little Baby Bunning are quite well, would you mind sending Mrs Jeffkins some partridges for I know she would like some. Tell Mamma to write to me as soon as she possibly can.

"Your affectionate
"Son
"J Leech

"P.S. I would not send the porter only I have got neither wafer nor seal'wax."

"Sepr 16th 1827

"My dear Papa.

"I am very happy indeed to say that I am promoted for I know it makes you happy. Let me come out next Saturday and come and see me to-morrow. I have no sealing wax or would not send the porter.

"I hope you are quite well and Mamma and Old Camello and the little Baby Bunning the same

"Your affectionate
"Son
"J Leech."

"Dear Papa

"As I am rather short of money and want to keep my money I've got, I should be much obliged if you would give my ambassador 18 pence or so as I've promised a boy at school one of those small bladders to make balloons of, if you remember you bought me one once. I hope you are all well

"I remain
"Your affectionate son
"J Leech."

"Dear Papa

"Will you be so kind as to send me half a crown by the porter and allowence me every week

"I was obliged to send the porter

"I hope you Mamma Brothers and sisters are quite well.

"Your affectionate son
"J Leech."
[No date.]

"My dear Mamma

"I understand that you came to see me yesterday, and me being in the green, you did not see me, so that made me still more unhappy, I beg you will come and see me on Saturday for I am very unhappy.

"I want to see you or Papa very much indeed.

"Your affectionate son
"J Leech."

"My dear Papa.

"You desired me to send you my report I have not had it since the last one. I went into be examined by Dr Russell yesterday but I did not get promoted but I did not lose more than one or two places. I will send you my next report. I hope you are quite well.

"Mamma and Brother and sisters the Same

"Your affectionate
"Son
"J Leech.

"I would have written to you sooner but *I had not time*."

Leech made no way at the Charterhouse; never approaching the position held by Thackeray, who was four years his senior: indeed, I doubt that they saw, or cared to see, much of each other, little dreaming that they would ultimately become dear

and fast friends till death separated them, only to meet again, as we believe, after the sad, short interval that elapsed between the deaths of each.

I cannot say I believe in inherited talent, but the fact that the elder Leech was said to be a remarkable draughtsman seems to strengthen the theory held by some people. I have never seen any specimens of the father's drawing, nor did I ever hear the son speak of it. Anyway, Leech *père* had no faith in the practice of art as a means of livelihood for his son, for he informed the youth, after a nine years' attendance at the Charterhouse, that he was destined for the medical profession. There is no record of any objection on the part of Leech to his father's decision, at which I feel surprise; for the flame which burnt so brilliantly in after-life must have been always well alight, and very antagonistic to the kind of work required from the embryo surgeon. Leech's gentle yielding nature influenced him then as always; and he went to St. Bartholomew's, where under Mr. Stanley, the surgeon of the hospital, he worked hard and delighted his master by his excellent anatomical drawings. From these studies may be traced, I think, much of the knowledge of the human form, and above all of *proportion*, always displayed in his work; for in those wonderful drawings, whether a figure is tall or short, fat or thin, whether he deals with a child or a giant, with a dog or a horse, no disproportion can be found.

It appears that the elder Leech's affairs were already in such an embarrassed condition, that an intention to place his son with Sir

George Ballingall, an eminent Scottish doctor, was abandoned, and after a time he was placed with a Mr. Whittle, a very remarkable person, who figures under the name of Rawkins in a novel written by Albert Smith and illustrated by Leech. Smith's work, with the title of "The Adventures of Mr. Ledbury and his Friend Jack Johnson," was first published in *Bentley's Miscellany*.

"Mr. Rawkins," says Albert Smith, "was so extraordinary a person for a medical practitioner that, had we only read of him instead of having known him, we should at once have put him down as the far-fetched creation of the author's brain. He was about eight-and-thirty years old, and of herculean build except his legs, which were small in comparison with the rest of his body. But he thought that he was modelled after the statues of antiquity, and, indeed, in respect of his nose, which was broken, he was not far wrong in his idea – that feature having been damaged in some hospital skirmish when he was a student. His face was adorned with a luxuriant fringe of black whiskers, meeting under his chin, whilst his hair, of a similar hue, was cut rather short about his head, and worn without the least regard to any particular style or direction. But it was also his class of pursuits that made him so singular a character. Every available apartment in his house not actually in use by human beings was appropriated to the conserving of innumerable rabbits, guinea-pigs, and ferrets. His areas were filled with poultry, bird-cages hung at every window, and the whole of his roof had been converted into one enormous pigeon-trap. It was one of his most

favourite occupations to sit, on fine afternoons, with brandy-and-water and a pipe, and catch his neighbours' birds. He had very little private practice; the butcher, the baker, and the tobacconist were his chief patients, who employed him more especially with the intention of working out their accounts. He derived his principal income from the retail of his shop, his appointments of medical man to the police force and parish poor, and breeding fancy rabbits. These various avocations pretty well filled up his time, and when at home he passed his spare minutes in practising gymnastics – balancing himself upon one hand and laying hold of staples, thus keeping himself at right angles to the wall, with other feats of strength, the acquisition of which he thought necessary in enabling him to support the character of Hercules – his favourite impersonation – with due effect."

It is not to be wondered at that Mr. Whittle, *alias* Rawkins, should find that stealing his neighbours' pigeons, together with his other unprofitable accomplishments, to say nothing of the sparseness of paying patients, could have only one termination – bankruptcy. Mr. Whittle ended his career in a public-house, of which he became proprietor after marrying the widow who kept it. Here he put off his coat to his work, and in his shirt-sleeves served his customers with beer. Leech and Albert Smith, and others of his pupils took his beer readily, though they had always declined to take his pills. It is said that he was originally a Quaker, and that he died a missionary at the Antipodes.

Leech stayed but a short time with the pigeon-fancying

Whittle, whom he left to be placed under Dr. John Cockle, afterwards Physician to the Royal Free Hospital. Leech seems to have been a pretty regular attendant at anatomical and other lectures, and it goes without saying that his notes were garnished with sketches, for which his fellow-students sat unconsciously; and plenty of them remain to prove the impossibility of checking an inclination so strongly implanted in such a genuine artist as John Leech.

CHAPTER II
EARLY WORK

It was at St. Bartholomew's that Leech made acquaintance, which soon ripened into friendship, with Albert Smith, Percival Leigh (a future comrade on the *Punch* Staff, and author of the "Comic Latin Grammar," "Pips' Diary," etc.), Gilbert à Beckett and many others, all or most of whom served as models for that unerring pencil.

The impecunious condition of Leech senior before John had reached his eighteenth year was such as to make his chances of getting a living by medicine or surgery, even if successful, so remote as to place them beyond consideration. No doubt the elder Leech's misfortunes were "blessings in disguise," for we owe to them the necessity that compelled the younger man to devote himself to art.

The art of drawing upon wood, to which Leech in his later years almost entirely confined himself, dates back from very early times. Lithography, or drawing upon stone, is a comparatively modern invention, and, until the introduction of photography, was used for varieties of artistic reproduction. It was to that process we owe the first published work of Leech. The artist was eighteen years old when "Etchings and Sketchings," by A. Pen, Esq., price 2s. plain, 3s. coloured,

was offered tremblingly to the public. The work was in the shape of four quarto sheets, which were covered with sketches, more or less caricatures, of cabmen, policemen, street musicians, hackney coachmen with their vehicles and the peculiar breed of animal attached to them, and other varieties of life and character common to the streets of London. This work is now very rarely to be met with; it consisted chiefly, I believe, of characteristic heads and half-length figures. To "Etchings and Sketchings" the young artist added some political caricatures, also in lithography, of considerable merit. With these, or, rather, with the heavy stones on which they were drawn, we may imagine the weary wanderings from publisher to publisher; the painful anxiety with which the verdict, on which so much depended, was waited for; the hopes that brightened at a word of commendation, only to be scattered by a few stereotyped phrases, such as, "Ah, very clever, but these sort of things are not in our way, you see; there is no demand," and so on.

1836, when Leech was still a boy, saw the production of works called "The Boy's Own Series," "Studies from Nature," "Amateur Originals," "The Ups and Downs of Life; or, The Vicissitudes of a Swell," etc.

The delicate touch and the grasp of character peculiar to the artist are recognised at once in many examples.

Leech's struggle for bread for himself and others must have been terrible at this time; indeed, up to the establishment of Rowland Hill's penny post, when, by what may be called a

brilliant opportunity, Leech attracted for the first time the public attention, which never deserted him.

The title of this book is "The Life and *Work* of John Leech." Of the former, as I have shown, there is little to tell; on the latter, volumes, critical, descriptive, appreciative, might be written. An artist is destined to immortality or speedy oblivion according to his work, and it was my earnest hope, on undertaking this memoir, that I should be able to prove, by the finest examples of Leech's genius, that an indisputable claim to immortality was established for him. To a great extent I have been permitted to do so; but the law of copyright has debarred me from the selection of many brilliant pictures of life and character on which my, perhaps unreasonably covetous, eyes had rested. The proprietors of *Punch* and also of the copyright of most of Leech's other works are, no doubt, properly careful of their interests, and I can imagine their surprise at the extent of my first demands upon their good-nature. In my ignorance I had thought that as my object was the honour and glory of John Leech – a feeling, no doubt, shared by them – the treasures of *Punch* would be spread before me, with a request that I would help myself. I do not in the least complain that I found myself mistaken. There are, no doubt, good reasons for the limits to which I was restricted, though I am unable to see them; and, granting the existence of those reasons, I should be ungrateful if I did not express my thanks for the small number of illustrations from *Punch* and other sources which I am allowed to use. I confess I was delighted to find that the first few

years of the existence of *Punch* were free by lapse of time from copyright protection, and as some of Leech's best work appears in the volumes between 1841 and 1849, I am able to show my readers further proofs of the justice of the artist's claim to be remembered for all time.

Leech's hatred of organ-grinding began very early in his career.

> "Wanted, by an aged Lady of very Nervous Temperament, a Professor, who will undertake to mesmerize all the Organs in her Street. Salary, so much per Organ."

The drawing which appeared in *Punch* in 1843, with the above title, was the first of the humorous series that continued almost unbroken for more than twenty years. It is pitiable to think of the long martyrdom that Leech suffered from an abnormal nervous organization, which ultimately made street-noises absolute agony to him. In the illustration the singular difference of dress in the organ-grinder of fifty years ago and him of the present time is noticeable, as also are the perfect expressions of the small audience. Leech's chief contributions to *Punch* at this time were the large cuts, in which Peel, Brougham, the great Duke of Wellington, and others, play political parts in matters that would be of little interest to the reader of to-day, nor are the drawings of exceptional merit.

In 1844 there appeared an irresistible little cut, the precursor of so many admirable variations of skating and sliding incidents.

"Now, Lobster, keep the Pot a-biling."

What could surpass the impudence of the vigorous youngster, or the expression of the guardsman of amused wonder as he looks down upon the audacious imp, as Goliath might have looked upon David?

The sensation created by the first appearance of the dwarf Tom Thumb remains vividly in my memory. I saw him in all his impersonations; that of Napoleon, in which he was dressed in exact imitation of the Emperor, was very droll. The little creature was at Waterloo, taking quantities of snuff from his waistcoat pocket, giving his orders for the final charge which decided his fate; and when he saw that all was lost, his distress was terrible: he wrung his little hands and wept copiously, amidst the uproarious applause and laughter of the audience. Then he was at St. Helena, and, standing on an imaginary rock, he folded his arms, and gazed wistfully in the direction of his beloved France. After a long, lingering look, he shook his little head, and with a sigh so loud as to astonish us, he dashed the tears from his eyes, and made his bow to the audience, some of whom affected to be shocked by the laughter of the unthinking, and loudly expressed their sympathy with the great man in his fall. I well remember the great Duke going to see the amusing dwarf, but why Leech should have represented him in the dancing attitude, as shown in the illustration, seems strange. Surely a more serious imitation

of a Napoleonic attitude would have been more telling and more comic.

The next print illustrates a paper in *Punch* called "Physicians and General Practitioners."

"The physician almost invariably dresses in black," says the writer, "and wears a white neck-cloth. He also often affects smalls and gaiters, likewise shirt-frills" (fancy a physician in these days thus dressed!). He appears, no doubt very properly, in perpetual mourning. The general practitioner more frequently sports coloured clothes, as drab trousers and a figured waistcoat. With respect to features, the Roman nose, we think, is more characteristic of physicians; while among general practitioners, we should say, the more common of the two was the snub.

The general practitioner and the physician often meet professionally, on which occasion their interests as well as their opinions are very apt to clash; whereupon an altercation ensues, which ends by the physician telling the general practitioner that he is an "impudent quack," and the general practitioner's replying to the physician that he is "a contemptible humbug."

How perfectly Leech has realized the scene for us the drawing abundantly shows. It is, perhaps, not too much to say that he never surpassed in drawing, expression, and character, these two admirable figures; full of contempt for each other, the emotion is expressed naturally, and with due regard to the peculiarities, widely varying, of each of the disputants.

More years ago than I care to remember, I met at dinner Mr.

Gibson, the Newgate surgeon. At that time an agitation was afoot respecting public executions, the advocates maintaining that the sight of a fellow-creature done to death acted as a deterrent on any of the sight-seers who were disposed to risk a similar fate, the objectors declaring that the exhibition only made brutes more brutal, and was in no way a deterrent. As Mr. Gibson had had a long experience of criminals and their ways, it was thought worth while to ask his opinion of the matter in dispute. The surgeon said that, feeling strongly on the subject of public hanging, he had made a point of asking persons under sentence of death if they had ever attended executions, and he found that over three-fourths – he told us the exact number, but I cannot trust my memory on the point – had witnessed the finishing of the law. So much for the deterrent effect. The disgraceful scenes that took place at the execution of the Mannings produced a powerful letter to the press from Dickens, and an equally powerful article in the *Daily News*, by Mr. Parkinson. Parliament was aroused, and public executions ceased.

The Leech drawing which follows appeared in 1845, some years before the Manning murder, and a considerable time previous to the agitation on the subject of hanging in public. If ever a moral lesson was inculcated by a work of art, this powerful drawing is an example. Who knows how much it may have done towards hastening the time when those horrible exhibitions ceased?

Is this squalid group, with debauchery and criminality in

evidence in each figure, likely to be morally impressed by the sight of a public hanging? What are they but types of a class that always frequented such scenes? The dreadful woman has carried her child with her; the little creature's attenuated limbs point to the neglect and ill-usage sure to be met with from such parents.

To those unacquainted with the "Caudle Lectures" by Douglas Jerrold, which appeared at this time in *Punch*, I recommend the perusal of those inimitable papers. One of their merits is their having given occasion for an admirable drawing by Leech. Lord Brougham was, in the eyes of *Punch* and many others, a firebrand in the House of Lords. He was irrepressible, contentious, and brilliant on all occasions, quarrelsome in the extreme, and a thorn in the side of whatever Government was in power unless he was a member of it. The Woolsack, more especially the object of his ambition, was made a very uneasy seat to any occupant. Behold him, then, as Mrs. Caudle – an excellent likeness – making night hideous for the unhappy Caudle, whose part is played by the Lord Chancellor – Lyndhurst – while the Caudle pillow is changed into the Woolsack.

"The Mrs. Caudle of the House of Lords."

"What do you say? *Thank heaven! you are going to enjoy the recess, and you'll be rid of me for some months?* Never mind. Depend upon it, when you come back, you shall have it again. No, I don't raise the House and set everybody by

the ears; but I'm not going to give up every little privilege, though it's seldom I open my lips, goodness knows!" – "Caudle Lectures" (improved).

Whether such a scene as the following ever took place may be doubted; but that it might have happened, and may happen again, there is no doubt. One meets with strange seaside objects, and to bathe at the same time as one's tailor is within the bounds of possibility. Leech evidently thought so, hence this delightful little cut, wherein we see the creditor – evidently a tailor – improving the occasion to remind his fellow-swimmer of his little bill. See the businesslike aspect of the one and the astonishment and alarm of the other, who in the next few vigorous strokes will place himself beyond the reach of his creditor.

Full of sympathy, as Leech was, for human suffering, and frequently as he dealt with sea-sickness, he certainly never showed the least pity for the sufferers by that miserable malady. Its ludicrous aspect was irresistible to him, as numbers of illustrations sufficiently prove, and none more perfectly than the one introduced in this place, with the title of "Love on the Ocean," representing a couple evidently married on the morning of this tempestuous day. "Why, oh why," I can hear the unhappy bridegroom say to himself, "did we not arrange to pass our honeymoon in some pleasant place in England, and so have avoided crossing this dreadful sea?" To be ill in the dear presence of – oh, horror! And the lady is so unconscious, so serenely unconscious, of the impending catastrophe! She enjoys the sea,

and, being of a poetical turn, she thus improves the occasion:

"Oh, is there not something, dear Augustus, truly sublime in the warring of the elements?"

Let anyone who suffers at sea fancy what it is to be spoken to at all, when the fearful sensations, the awful precursors of the inevitable, have full possession of him, and then to suffer in the very presence of the dear creature from whom every human weakness has been hitherto carefully hidden! The drawing is followed by a poem, in which the position of the unhappy Augustus is described. He could not speak in reply to his bride's appeal; in the words of the poet:

> "She gazed upon the wave,
> Sublime she declared it;
> But no reply he gave —
> He could not have dared it.
>
> "Oh, then, 'Steward!' he cried,
> With deepest emotion;
> Then tottered to the side,
> And leant o'er the ocean."

Poor miserable Augustus! his face is pale as death, his treasured locks blown out of shape; his eyeglass swings in the wind; the distant steamer is making mad plunges into the heaving wave; the rain falls, and let us hope the romantic bride turns away as her young husband "leans o'er the ocean."

Only those who have passed from the tableland of life can recollect the passion for speculation in railways that took possession of the public in 1845 and the two or three following years. I myself caught the disease, and, acting on the advice of "one who knew," I bought a number of shares in one of the new lines; these were £25 shares, on which £8 each had been paid. I was assured by my adviser that I should receive interest at the rate of eight per cent. till the year 1850; after that time the line would pay ten. I awoke one morning to find that a panic was in full blast, and all railway property depreciated. My feelings may be imagined, for I certainly cannot describe them, when I found, on reference to the *Times*, that my £8 shares – £17 being still due upon each – were quoted at half a crown apiece! My friend had the courage of his opinions, for he had invested the whole of his property in railway stocks. He was completely ruined in mind and body, and died miserably before the panic was over.

Multiply these examples by thousands, and you will arrive at a clear idea of the nature of a panic, which seems to mystify the young gentleman immortalized by Leech in the drawing illustrating the following dialogue:

> "I say, Jim, what's a Panic?"
>
> "Blowed if I know; but there is von to be seen in the City."

It has been my fate in the course of a long life to attend several fancy-dress balls, but I can scarcely call to mind a single example of the successful assumption of an historical character,

or, indeed, of any character that could disguise the very modern young lady or gentleman who was masquerading in it. My first acquaintance with Mark Lemon, so long the esteemed editor of *Punch*, began in the Hanover Square Rooms, at a fancy-dress ball given by a society – chiefly, I think, composed of the better class of tradespeople – called the Gothics. On that occasion might have been seen a young gentleman in the dress of one of Charles II.'s courtiers, and looking about as unlike his prototype as possible – in earnest conversation with another courtier, of the time of George II. I was of the Charles' period, Lemon of that of the Georges. Those who remember Lemon's figure later in life would have been surprised by the change that time had made in it, if they could have witnessed the interview between the two young men, one scarcely stouter than the other. In proof of my idea that the greater number of guests were in trade, I might give scraps of conversation between Mary Queen of Scots and Guy Fawkes, or between Henry VIII. and Edward the Black Prince, that would leave no doubt on the subject; nay, later in the evening I had convincing proof of the correctness of my surmise, as you shall hear. I danced with a Marie Antoinette of surpassing beauty, with whom I fell incontinently in love. More than once I danced with her, and when supper was announced, my earnest appeal to be allowed to conduct her to the banquet was successful. My lovely friend was full of the curiosity peculiar to her sex, which showed itself in her anxiety to know who and what I was. To tell the truth, I was equally curious to know who she was, and what her

friends were.

"Well," said I, "if you will tell me who you are, I will tell you who I am and what I am."

"Oh," was the reply, "I think I know what you are; but what's your name?"

"You know what I am?" said I, surprised; "what am I?"

"Well, you are in the same line that we are, I fancy."

"And what line is that?"

"The army tailoring. Am I right?"

In the illustration that accompanies these remarks Leech has succeeded in presenting to us a Norman knight completely characteristic, a Crusader more real, I think, than any modern could have rendered him. The lady he escorts, in a dress a few hundred years after Crusading times, is very lovely. The capital little Marchioness, with the big door-key, the four-wheeler, and the laughing crowd, make up a scene of inimitable humour.

We now come to the first of those precocious youths in whose mannish ways, whose delightful impertinence to their elders, whose early susceptibility to the passion of love for ladies three times older than themselves, are shown by Leech in many a scene I should have given to my readers, but over them the Copyright Act stands guard. "'Tis true, 'tis pity, pity 'tis, 'tis true," that in a book intended solely to do honour to Leech's genius, so many of the most perfect examples of it are denied to us.

Well may the governor stare with open-mouthed astonishment at such a proposal from such a creature! Look at him as he throws

his little arm over his chair in the swaggering attitude he has so often observed in his elders, and raises a full glass of claret! "Just as the twig is bent the tree's inclined;" but that we know that in this instance the twig is indulging in a harmless freak, one might be inclined to dread the tree's inclining.

The political opinions of the writer of this book are of no consequence to himself or anybody else. It would perhaps be pretty near the truth if he were to admit that he had no political opinions worth speaking of. To those, however, who were interested in the struggle for Free Trade, which in the year 1846 raged with great fury, the question was, and still is, one of vital interest. The landed interest, headed by most of the aristocracy on the one side, and the manufacturing interest, championed by Cobden and Bright, on the other, raised a storm in which language the reverse of parliamentary was tossed from side to side. Peel was Prime Minister, and his ultimate conversion to the principles of Free Trade, and consequent advocacy of the repeal of the Corn Laws, horrified his supporters – by whom, notably by Disraeli, he became the object of envenomed attack – but led to a settlement of the question, and gave Leech an opportunity for the production of drawings of the victor and the vanquished, entitled, Cobden's "Bee's Wing" and Richmond's "Black Draught," two of the most successful of the political cartoons.

"The Brook Green Volunteer" gave Leech the opportunity for many illustrations which, to my mind, are nearer approaching

caricature than most of his work; nor have they, as a rule, the beauty or human interest that so many of his drawings show. I fear I must charge the volunteer himself with being in possession of an impossible face and a no less impossible figure; his action also is exaggerated. In compensation we have a delightful family group. The mother with that naked baby perambulating her person is beyond all praise. Women do strange things, but I deny the possibility of such a woman as Leech has drawn ever finding it in her heart to marry that volunteer. The little thing standing on tip-toe to dabble in baby's basin for the benefit of her doll, the delighted lookers-on, not forgetting the warrior riding his umbrella into action, are invested with the charm that Leech, and Leech only, could give them.

The year 1846 gave birth to the first fruit from a field in which Leech found such a bountiful harvest. The racecourse gave opportunities for the exhibition of life and character of which the great artist took advantage in numberless delightful examples. Pen and pencil record adventures by road and rail. Whether the excursionist is going to the Derby or returning from it, whether he is high or low, a Duke or a costermonger, that unerring hand is ready to note his follies or his excesses, always with a kindly touch, or to point a moral if a graver opportunity presents itself.

A madman, they say, thinks all the world mad but himself; and it is not uncommon for a drunken man to imagine himself to be the only sober person in the company. That some feeling of this kind possesses the rider in the drawing opposite, as he

addresses the stolid postboy, is evident enough; his drunken smile, his battered hat, and his dishevelled dress, are eloquent of his proceedings on the course; and if his return from the Derby is not signalized by a fall from his horse, he will be more fortunate than he deserves to be. In works of art the value of contrast is well known, and a better example than the face of the postboy offers to that of his questioner could not be imagined. He drunk, indeed! not a bit of it.

A pretty creature in the background must not be overlooked. She is a perfect specimen of Leech's power of creating beauty by a few pencil-marks. Her beauty has evidently attracted notice, and caused complimentary remarks from passers-by, which are resented by the old lady in charge, who tells the speaker to "*go on with his imperdence*!"

> Smith: "Hollo! Poster, ain't you precious drunk, rather?"
> Postboy: "Drunk! not a bit of it!"

I cannot resist presenting my readers with another Derby sketch. It is more than probable that if either of these young gentlemen had asked for leave of absence from his official duties for the purpose of going to the Derby, he would have met with stern denial. The attraction, however, is irresistible, and though the subterfuge by which it is achieved is not to be defended, who is there that is not glad that the wicked boy is penning that audacious letter, as it is the cause of our having a picture that is a joy for ever? As a work of art, whether as a composition of lines and light and shadow, in addition to perfect character and

expression, this drawing takes rank amongst the best of Leech's works. Note the admirable action of the youth who is putting on his coat – a momentary movement caught with consummate skill.

"Gentlemen,

"Owing to sudden and very severe indisposition, I regret to say that I shall not be able to attend the office to-day. I hope, however, to be able to resume my duties to-morrow.

"I am, gentlemen,
"Yours very obediently,
"Phillip Cox."

Doctors differ, as everybody knows; and in no opinion do they differ more than in the way children should be treated. One of the faculty will tell you that a healthy child should be allowed to eat as much as he or she likes; another advises that as grown-up people are disposed to eat a great deal more than is good for them, a boy is pretty sure to do the same unless a wholesome check is imposed upon his unruly appetite. A great authority is reported to have said that as many people are killed by over-eating as by over-drinking; "in fact," said he, "they dig their graves with their teeth." If that be so, the young gentleman in "Something like a Holiday" is destined for an early tomb.

Comment on this wonderful youth is needless. We can only share the alarm and astonishment so admirably expressed in the pastrycook's face. That this awful juvenile's memory should serve him so perfectly when he has taken such pains to cloud it, as well as every other faculty, is also surprising.

Pastrycook: "What have you had, sir?"

Boy: "I've had two jellies; seven of those, and eleven of these; and six of those, and four bath-buns; a sausage-roll, ten almond-cakes, and a bottle of ginger-beer."

Little Boy: "Oh lor, ma! I feel just exactly as if my jacket was buttoned."

If "a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind," the boy in the following drawing would have delighted in the society of the *gourmet* at the pastrycook's. Boiled beef and gooseberry-pie are good things enough in their way, but one may have too much of a good thing, with the inevitable result of the tightening of the jacket. This greedy-boy drawing appeared in 1846, and created a great sensation in the youth of that day, and many days since. Careful parents have been known to use this terrible example of over-eating as a warning to their offspring that a fit of apoplexy frequently followed the tightening of the jacket.

I think my married reader of the rougher sex will agree with me when I say that there are few more uncomfortable, not to say alarming, moments than those spent in the awful interview with the parents of his beloved, during which he has to prove beyond all doubt that he is in every respect an individual to whom the happiness of a "dear child" can be safely entrusted. What a bad quarter of an hour that is before the meeting, when he has grave doubts as to the sufficiency of his income! Will it, with other future possibilities, be considered sufficient to assure to "my daughter, sir, the comforts to which she has been accustomed"?

This he will have to answer satisfactorily, together with a few score more questions more or less agonizing. Leech drew a scene of common application when he produced the picture that follows, which he calls "Rather Alarming" – "On Horror's Head, Horrors accumulate." Look at that terrible female and prospective mother-in-law! – think of satisfying such a woman that you are worthy of admission into her family! How sincerely one pities that poor little Corydon, and how heartily one wishes him success!

"Rather Alarming."

> Lady: "You wished, sir, I believe, to see me respecting the state of my daughter's affections with a view to a matrimonial alliance with that young lady. If you will walk into the library, my husband and I will discuss the matter with you."
>
> Young Corydon: "Oh, gracious!"

Leech treats – how admirably! – another greedy boy, or, rather, two greedy boys.

> Jacky: "Hallo, Tommy! what 'ave you got there?"
> Tommy: "Hoyster!"
> Jacky: "Oh, give us a bit!"

A Calais oyster, no doubt – large enough for both; but Tommy will not share his happiness. Intensity of expression pervades him

from his open mouth to his fingers' ends. Jacky's face and figure are no less expressive of eagerness to join in the banquet.

If ever man suffered from *embarras de richesse*, I am that individual in making a selection from the early drawings of Leech; where all, or nearly all, are so perfect, choice becomes difficult indeed. I cannot resist, however, the one that follows this remark. For perfection of character and richness of humour, it seems to me unsurpassable. The doctor's attitude as he contemplates his victim – who seems to have brought with her the huge empty physic-bottles to prove that she has taken all her "stuff" – to say nothing of his startling individuality, is Nature itself; and that immortal pupil with the big knife, smiling in anticipation of the operation "to-morrow about eleven"! One can read on the face of the patient a dull realization of the doctor's announcement that only a seton in the back of her neck – whatever that may mean to her – will be of any service now; and to render the operation successful, she must have her head shaved.

The statue of the Duke of Wellington, which so long disgraced Hyde Park Corner, has disappeared, to the satisfaction of the world in general, though there were, I believe, a few dissentients who saw, or said they saw, beauty in one of the most hideous objects ever perpetrated by the hand of man; yet the "ayes had it," and the monster has departed.

The effigy was manufactured in a studio near Paddington Green, and it was on its journey through the Edgware Road to

the arch now on Constitution Hill that the gentleman in Leech's cartoon was startled by a very remarkable object, to say the least of it.

Speaking from my own experience, I have always found a difficulty in giving the effect of wind in a picture; the action of it on drapery, trees, skies, etc., is – from the almost momentary nature of the gusts – far from an easy task. No one who ever handled a brush or a pencil has been so successful as Leech in conveying the action of wind on every object, and never did he succeed more completely than in an "Awful Scene on the Chain Pier at Brighton," which is, no doubt, somewhat farcical; but how intensely funny! Master Charley has gone, and his ma's parasol has accompanied him. The horror-struck nursemaid is almost blown off her feet; and Charley's brother, also terror-stricken, will be down on his back in a moment; whilst his little sister maintains her equilibrium with great difficulty. The flying hat, and the couple staggering against the blast in the distance, all help to realize for us the exact effect of a wind-storm.

> Nursemaid: "Lawk! there goes Charley, and he's took his ma's parasol! What *will* missus say?"
>
> Waiter: "Gent in No. 4 likes a holder and a thinner wine, does he? I wonder how he'll like this bin!"

As there is no condition in life that has not proved food for Leech's pencil, that of the waiter was fruitful in many never-to-be-forgotten scenes. I introduce one which is very humorous, and scarcely an exaggeration. It is called "How to Suit the Taste." A

guest seems to have found his port too new and strong.

One of the peculiarities of Leech's art is that "time cannot wither it, nor custom stale its infinite variety." I defy the most serious Scotchman to look at the sketch below without laughing at it. As the gentleman who is on the highroad to being parboiled is in one of the sketches of 1846, many of my readers may see him for the first time. I envy that man; but though I am very familiar with the wonderful little drawing, a renewed acquaintance is always a delight to me. We know the bather can jump out of the scalding water when he likes, but there he is, with clouds of steam rising about him, screaming in deadly terror for "somebody" to come to his rescue.

> Better-Half (*loq.*): "Is this what you call sitting up with a sick friend, Mr. Wilkins?"

Here follows a drawing of a different character, opening up very appreciable possibilities, and not very pleasant consequences for the hero of the piece. Mr. Wilkins left the domestic hearth to sit up with a sick friend. "Yes, my dear," I can hear him say to his spouse, "I may be late; for if I find I can comfort the poor fellow by my conversation, I cannot find it in my heart to hurry away from him." Wicked Mr. Wilkins! What was there wrong in going to a masquerade? and if it was criminal to do so, why leave the evidence of your guilt where Mrs. W. could find it? Was that a *lady's* mask? In the eyes of the outraged wife I dare say it was, though it may only have been used to cover the homely features of the deceiver, whose pale face and empty

soda-water bottle plainly prove that the evening's entertainment will not bear the morning's reflections.

> Juvenile: "I say, Charley, that's a jeuced fine gurl talking to young Fipps! I should like to catch her under the mistletoe."

The first drawings of "The Rising Generation," in which are portrayed the premature affections and the amusing affectations of the manners and sayings of their elders that, according to Leech, distinguished the *jeunesse doré* of England, appeared in 1846, and have been so admirably described by Dickens elsewhere as to leave me only the task of placing some of the drawings before the reader, carefully avoiding those the great writer has noticed so felicitously. The young gentleman in the drawing introduced here would like to catch the pretty creature talking to the fascinating young man under the mistletoe, no doubt! We know his wicked intentions; but how would he carry them out? He is not tall enough to reach the lady's elbow; but love in such passionate natures laughs at difficulties, and he will find a way; and he calls a man old enough to be his father *young* Fipps! Delightful little dog! and no less delightful is his friend Charley, who smiles encouragement, and would do likewise. These works of Leech possess what it is not too much to call an historical interest, as they chronicle truly the dresses of the time. In the object of our young friend's admiration, I fancy I see the approach of crinoline, while her ringlets afford a striking contrast to the fringes of the present day. An old lady would now

create a sensation indeed if she appeared in a turban like that which bedecks the sitting figure.

> Juvenile: "Uncle!"
>
> Uncle: "Now, then, what is it? This is the fourth time you've woke me up, sir."
>
> Juvenile: "Oh! just put a few coals on the fire and pass the wine, that's a good old chap!"

Again the irrepressible juvenile, under different conditions. Behold him practising upon a very testy old gentleman, who has been so rude, in the estimation of his young nephew, as to go to sleep after dinner.

> Juvenile: "Ah, it's all very well! Love may do for boys and gals; but we, as men of the world, know 'ow 'ollow it is."

In his notices of the freaks of the rising generation Leech did not confine himself to juveniles of the higher and middle ranks, but occasionally he shows us the young snob, of whom he makes – with modifications – the same mannish and amusingly vain creature as his confrères, the little swells. As an illustration, I present my reader with a scene in a coffee-house, in which two friends are refreshing themselves, and exchanging philosophical reflections on the vanities of human life. These lads look like shop-boys, but – in their own estimation – with souls far above their positions in life. The spokesman has found the truth of the poet's description of the course of true love in the conduct of some barmaid who has jilted him, hence his bitterness.

In the year 1847 Leech produced much of his best work, and

in justification of this dictum I advise the study of a drawing full of character, humour, and beauty. Thousands of heads of households could vouch for the truth of the situation depicted there, and where is the mistress whose mind has not misgiven her when a request from her pretty servant has been urged that she might "go to chapel this evening"? "Chapel, indeed!" one can hear her mutter to herself; "I've not the least doubt the baker's man is waiting for her round the corner!" I am loath to find fault with such a work as this, but I *do* think that perfect maid deserved a more presentable lover than the pudding-faced, knock-kneed soldier who is personating the "bit of ribbin." The artist appears to me to charge his story-telling maid with very bad taste indeed. Would the drawing have lost, or gained, if Leech had given us a handsome young guardsman instead of this ugly fellow? He would, at any rate, have made the little fib a little more pardonable. The other figures deserve careful attention – notably, the youth absorbed in the study of natural history.

> Servant-Maid: "If you please, mem, could I go out for half an hour to buy a bit of ribbin, mem?"

If there be amongst my readers any who are unfamiliar with Cruikshank's illustrations of "Oliver Twist," I advise them to turn to them, where they will find a drawing of Fagin in the condemned cell at Newgate, one of the most awful renderings of agonized despair ever depicted by the hand of an artist. This great work is travestied by Leech in a manner so admirable as to make the travesty take rank with the original. Instead of Fagin, see

King Louis Philippe smarting under the failure of his schemes and the impending fall of his dynasty. By the Spanish marriages the veteran trickster destroyed the power which he sought to consolidate.

Domestic troubles and misadventures were represented by Leech in many examples, with a sympathetic humour that never wearies. A party may be assembled for a dinner which is strangely delayed; conversation flags into silence. The host and hostess become uneasy, when a button-boy appears with the ominous "Oh, if you please, 'm, cook's very sorry, 'm, could she speak to you for a moment?" Something has happened; but we are left in uncertainty as to what it was.

Or the dinner is served, when an alarming announcement is made:

> Servant (*rushing in*): "Oh, goodness gracious, master! There's the kitchen chimley afire, and two parish ingins a-knocking at the street door."

One of the happiest of the servant-gal-isms appears this year – the precursor of many excellent tunes on the same string – delightfully illustrative of the vanity which we all share, more or less, with our maids. In the picture that follows, the sight of the old lady's new bonnet and a convenient looking-glass have provided an opportunity that the pretty servant could not resist. She must see how she looks in it – and behold the result!

> Domestic (*soliloquizing*): "Well, I'm sure, missis had better give this new bonnet to me, instead of sticking

such a young-looking thing upon her old shoulders." (The impudent minx has immediate warning.)

I must refer my readers to *Punch's* almanac for 1848, copiously illustrated by Leech, for many admirable examples of his many-sided powers. Alas! my space forbids the reproduction of any of them. Amongst the rest there is one of a gentleman suffering from influenza, which, by the way, seems to have been as prevalent in 1848 as it has been recently, though not so fatal in its effects. Our sufferer is visited by a condoling friend: he sits with his feet in hot water, and, with his hand on the bell-pull, he says, "This is really very kind of you to call. Can I offer you anything? A basin of gruel, or a glass of cough mixture? Don't say no!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.