THE CONCEITED PIG.

WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS
BY HARRISON WEIR,

ENGRAVED ON WOOD.

LONDON:
JOHN AND CHARLES MOZLEY,
6, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1852.

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CONCEITED PIG,
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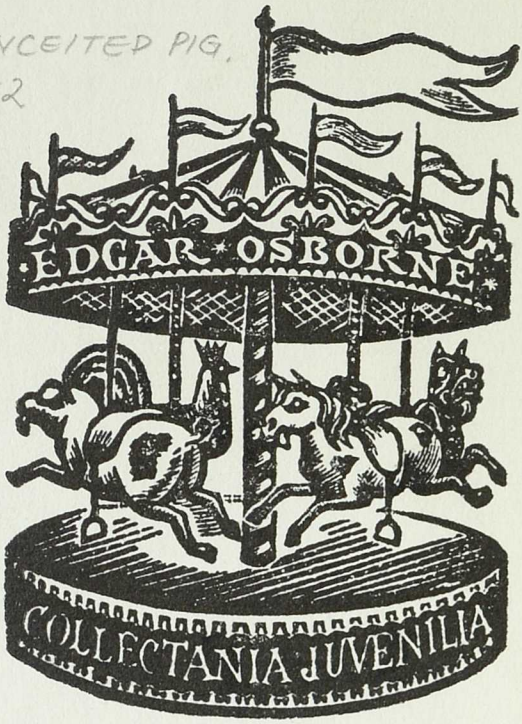

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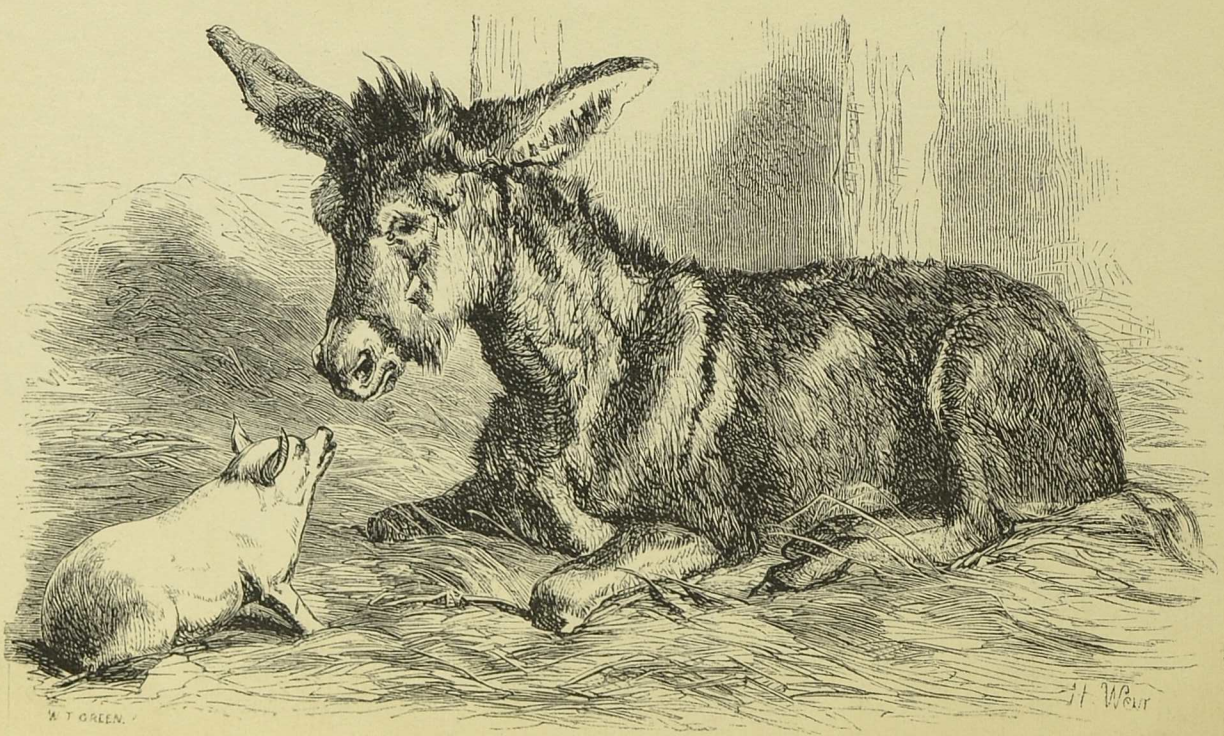

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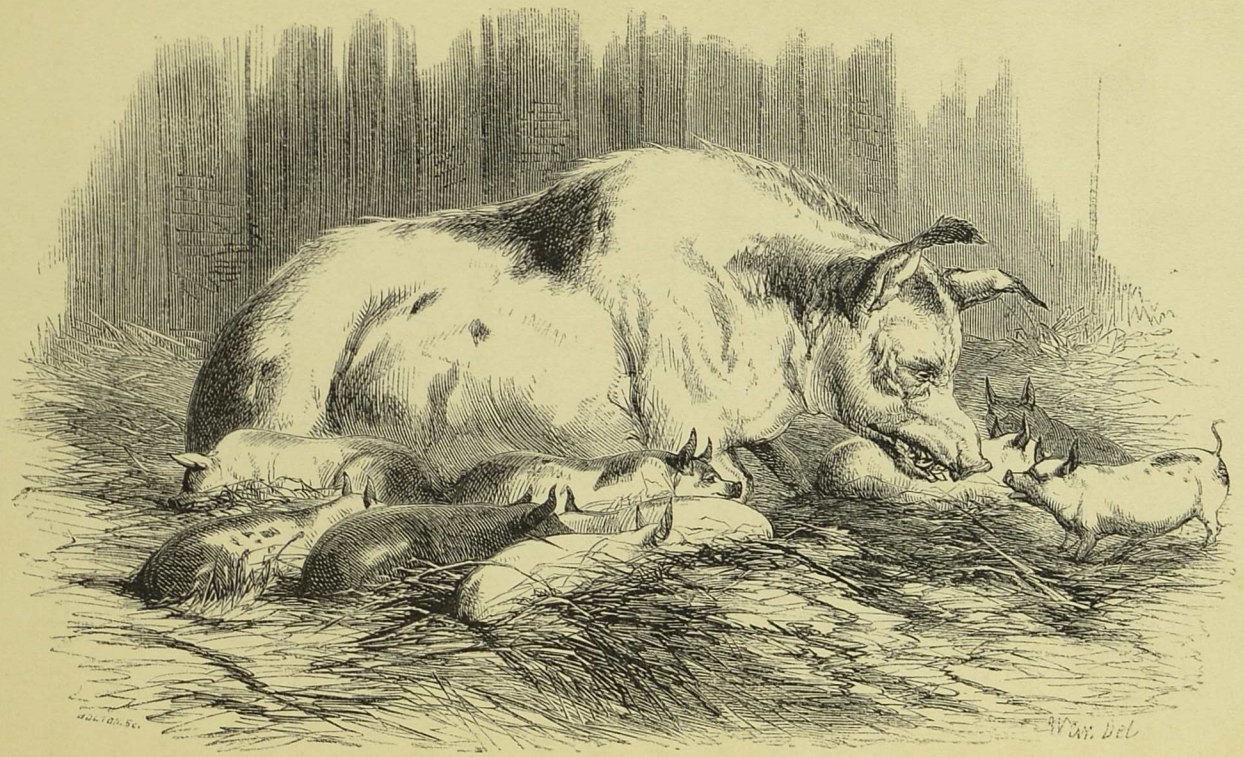
THE CONCEITED PIG.

One cold November evening, several little pigs were lying very comfortably in their sty, and keeping themselves warm by burying their noses under the straw, when one who had been routing about very uneasily for some time gave a loud grunt all at once, and seemed to be very much frightened. His mother, the old sow, who was stretched in one corner of the

sty fast asleep, opened her little brown eyes, and asked in a very angry voice what was the matter. Several of the little pigs answered at once that it was only Wilful who was making such a noise that nobody could go to sleep.

"Hush, hush, hush!" cried Wilful, as soon as his brothers were silent; "hush! do not you hear a great cracking and noise the other side of the yard? I am quite sure that the stables are on fire. Had not we better all go and help to put it out directly?"

"Nonsense and stuff, you foolish little fellow!" exclaimed his mother; "you are always fancying something or other is the matter, and wanting to poke your nose into things that don't concern you. I cannot hear any noise at all, and I beg



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you will be quiet, and let me go to sleep again."

The little pig did not dare answer his mother ; so he lay quite still for a minute or two, hoping that he should hear the same noise again. And presently he did hear it, louder than before, and there could be no doubt that more than usual was going on about the premises. He looked round to see what his mother would say now ; but she had fallen fast asleep again, and two or three of his brothers were snoring very loud. His little brother Fatsides was lying close to him, and Wilful thought by the twinkling of his eyes that he was not really asleep ; so he gave him a kick, and said in a very low voice, for fear his mother should hear him, "Fatsides, Fatsides, do you hear ?

there is that strange noise come back that I heard before. Do just listen. What can it be ?"

"Oh, I dare say it is nothing but the horses in the stable, or that wretched old Hector rattling his everlasting chain," answered Fatsides. "You know the other night when you woke us all up, it turned out to be nothing but Buttercup rubbing her horns against the crib."

"Ah, very likely," interrupted Wilful; "but this is a very different thing. There, just hear that strange popping sound : depend upon it, either the stables are on fire, or there are a number of those frightful great blue butchers killing and carrying off all the cows. I am determined, at any rate, that I will go and see what is the matter."

"Oh, pray do not go!" exclaimed little Fatsides. "How do you know that one of the great blue butchers may not get hold of you and carry you off?"

"I should like to see them!" said Wilful. "No, no; I have lived long enough in the world to be wiser than that, too. The blue butchers will never catch me, I can tell you; clever as they think themselves, they will find that they have met with their match at last!"

"Well, I know you are very clever," rejoined his brother, who was getting very sleepy, "and so I suppose you must have your own way. But I do not see how you are to get out; for you know Bob always shuts the door the last thing."

"Ah, very likely," said Wilful; "but the door does not fasten tight, and I can

push it open with very little trouble whenever I like. The other morning, before any of you were awake, I went out to desire Cock-a-doodle not to crow so loud, because I thought it would disturb my mother, and nobody knew any thing about it; and Cock-a-doodle, by the way, behaved so extremely ill, that I have taken no notice of him ever since. Poor fellow! I suppose I must give him a kind word to-morrow; for my friend Miss Peck tells me that he seemed sadly out of spirits, and she was certain he was a good deal cut up about it, for she had seen him skulking behind the faggot pile all by himself, and though he pretended to be picking up an insect when he saw her, she was sure that he had really retired there to mourn over

his misconduct. I wish that Miss Peck were here now, that I might have her opinion about this dreadful noise. It is really worse than ever. What do you think I had better do, Fatsides ?"

But Fatsides made no answer ; he had fallen asleep whilst Wilful was talking, and all the others were snoring away as happily as possible. Wilful saw it was of no use to try to make any of them go out with him into the yard ; and to go out he was determined, come what would of it, for he had one of those inquisitive and restless dispositions that cannot be satisfied without prying into every thing. He lay quite still, however, for a minute or two, to make sure of his mother's being asleep ; and then rustling carefully through the straw, he pushed hard against

the door of the sty, which opened suddenly with such a loud creak as made the old sow give a great grunt, and half open one of her eyes. Wilful himself nearly jumped out of his skin, but recovering himself directly, he set off and ran as fast as he could along one side of the yard, without thinking where he was going, till he was stopped by coming against some great rough thing that lay in his way. The stars were shining brightly up in the sky, and by their light Wilful could just see that it was Jack, the old donkey, who was stretched out on the straw close to the cart-shed, dosing away an hour or two to shorten the night. He opened his eyes when Wilful ran up against him, and asked rather drowsily what was the matter.

"My dear sir," said Wilful, "is it possible that you have been lying quietly here whilst such dreadful things are going on about the premises ?"

"What things ?" said Jack, opening his eyes rather wider.

"What things ?" rejoined Wilful ; "why all this shooting, and stabbing, and burning, and butchering that has been carrying on here ever since nightfall."

"Carrying on where ?" exclaimed Jack, who was completely puzzled and amazed at Wilful's way of talking.

Now if there was any one creature in the world that Wilful had the least respect for, it was old Jack, who was, indeed, universally looked up to, and held to be a very knowing old fellow ; but

this proud young pig now quite lost his temper at what he thought Jack's slowness and stupidity. He answered him, I am sorry to say, in a very impertinent manner, and ended by telling him that, though he was so much older, a clever young fellow like himself was worth two of him ; and Miss Peck said one day, that if, she knew who, were not a donkey, he never would have worn those frightful long ears all his life !

Old Jack half shut up his eyes again, and took no more notice of this speech than by smiling contemptuously.

"I tell you what, old gentleman," said Wilful, in a great rage, "I thought it my duty to come and tell you, as an old friend, that you will certainly be killed before to-morrow morning ; but as you

do not care about it, I shall go and tell the blue butchers that you are ready to be made nasty pork of immediately."

Jack was very sleepy, but the idea of his becoming pork tickled his fancy so much, that he lifted up his head and laughed aloud. The sight of his great teeth glimmering in the starlight enraged Wilful more than ever, and seeing that nothing he said made the least impression, he scampered off, without another word, as fast as his legs could carry him. What to do next he could not determine; the great noise that he had heard seemed to have died away, and it had just crossed his mind whether it would not be better to go home again, when there came a tremendous cracking sound in the air above him, and something as bright as

fire fell close to his feet, hissed along the ground for a second or two, and then disappeared.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Wilful, as soon as he had recovered his breath and his senses—for he was completely scared at first; "goodness gracious! as sure as I'm alive, the stars are all falling out of the sky. Something must be done directly; somebody must go and tell the Queen. Where is Miss Peck? I must speak to her first, and then I shall set off to the Queen's house immediately."

So saying, Wilful made the best of his way across the yard towards the henhouse, and succeeded after some time in finding the little sliding door, which, unfortunately, was shut. There was an open grating above, Wilful knew, but he

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could not reach it, so he had nothing for it but to scratch the door gently, and call Miss Peck as loud as he dared, without disturbing Cock-a-doodle. Now Miss Peck, luckily for Wilful, seldom slept well. She was subject to spasms in her left leg, which made her restless, and was besides apt to fancy that somebody else had got a warmer corner than she had, so that she was continually shifting her place.

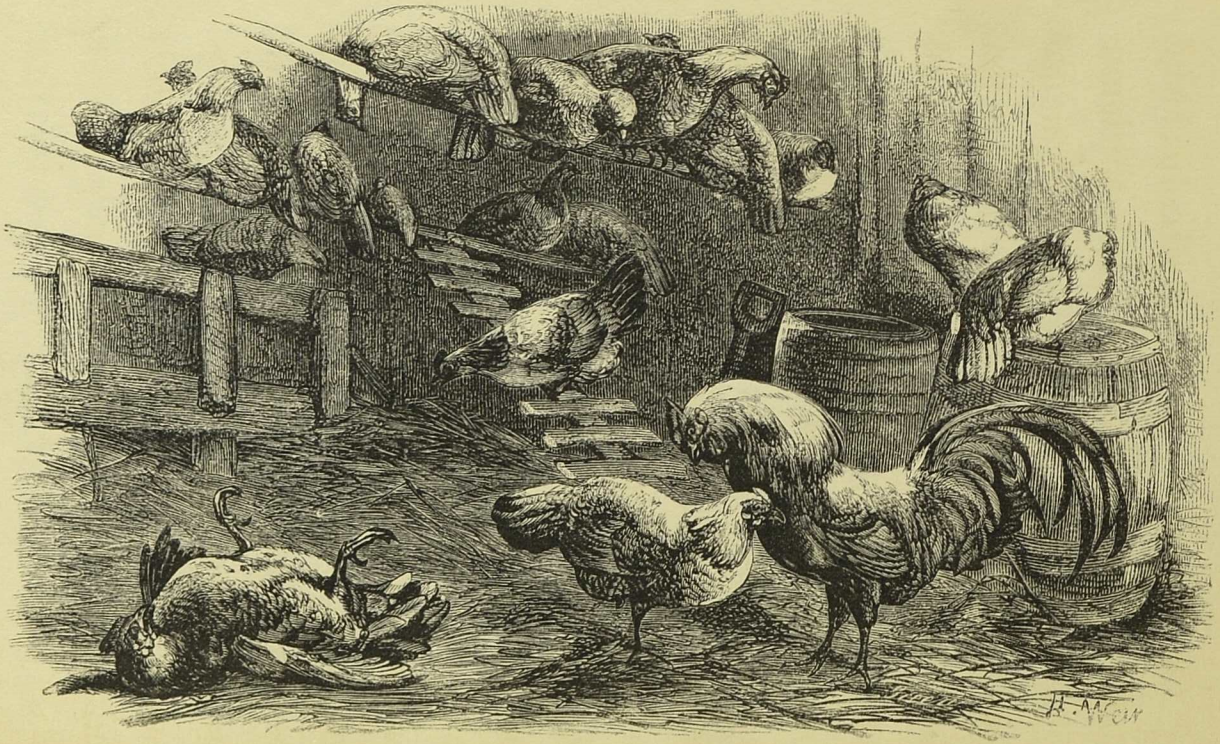
Not seldom, indeed, the families who lodged on the lower perch were upset and terrified in the middle of the night by something coming flapping and tumbling over them, which turned out to be Miss Peck, who was "really very sorry to be any annoyance to them, but what with the chills which ran over her on

account of her sleeping-place being so particularly exposed to draughts, and what with the incessant spasms in her poor left leg, she could not support herself a moment longer, if she died for it." These accidents, of course did not make Miss Peck a popular character ; and at last a general agreement was made, that the next time Miss Peck fell off her perch, she should not be allowed to come up again, but should be kept on the hen-house floor all the night. Cock-a-doodle was at the bottom of this plot against the unfortunate Peck, and it was no great wonder that he wished to oblige her to turn over a new leaf; for whenever she fell off her sleeping-place, she always found herself too weak to get up again without assistance, and would never trust

any one to help her but her "dear friend Cock-a-doodle," who was obliged to do it for peace and quietness' sake.

Now it happened, on the very night of which we are speaking, that Miss Peck had gone to bed in particularly ill-humour; for just as they were all entering the hen-house that afternoon, Cock-a-doodle had chosen to help that flaunting young creature, Miss Spangle, up the hen-house stairs instead of herself, though she had complained of a violent spasm just a moment before. Miss Peck therefore, being, as I have said, very much out of sorts, sat upon her perch with one eye shut, and the other scowling down upon Miss Spangle, who slept just beneath her; and her sufferings from cramp and chills were so uncommonly acute, that she

could obtain no ease except by continually twitching her legs up and down, flapping her wings, shaking herself violently, and making a very unpleasant noise in her throat, as if she were choking. No one taking any notice of this uncomfortable state, though the slumbers of several of the neighbours were very much disturbed in consequence, Miss Peck grew more and more restless and spiteful ; and seeing Miss Spangle in the full enjoyment of a delightful nap, she flung herself suddenly down upon her with such force as to push her off the perch, and send her rolling on the hen-house floor. Miss Peck herself, though she tried hard to keep her balance, fell over on her back, and screamed violently, which woke Cock-a-doodle, who, of course, insisted on knowing what was the matter.



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"Oh, it is only Peck in her spasms," croaked out two or three sleepy old hens.

"No, no, it is me," cried poor Spangle from the ground; "Miss Peck has thrown me off my perch, and broken my head all over."

Cock-a-doodle's indignation on hearing this is not to be told. He flew down instantly from the upper story where he lodged, would not listen to one word Miss Peck had to say, in spite of her groans and lamentations, and examined Spangle's head with the greatest kindness and attention. It was found to be not at all seriously injured, so Cock-a-doodle said he would assist her up stairs again with the greatest pleasure, but that Peck should remain where she was all night, and if she attempted to disobey him he

would come down, and punish her severely. Miss Peck screamed, protested, said it was all Spangle's fault, that Cock-a-doodle did not behave like a gentleman, that both her legs were broken, and that she hoped he would come to be hung, as she knew many of his family had been before him.

"Hold your tongue," cried Cock-a-doodle at last, after she had been going on in this way for some time; "you have hindered me so long by your nonsense that it is just crowing-time again." So he shouted out cock-a-doodle-doo as loud as he could, and then putting his head under his wing, composed himself to sleep again, as if nothing had been the matter.

In the mean time Miss Peck stood

muttering on one leg, in a corner of the hen-house, and thinking how she should be revenged, when she heard a low rap-tap-tap at the door. She took no notice of it at first, being too full of her own troubles to attend to any thing else; but very soon it was repeated, and on her hobbling rather nearer to the door, and turning her head a little on one side to listen the better, she distinctly heard her own name repeated two or three times in a very low voice on the outside. Miss Peck, though "all of a tremble," as she said herself afterwards, had sufficient presence of mind just to look up, and make sure that Cock-a-doodle and all the others were asleep, before she answered, in as sweet a tone as possible,

"Who's there? Who wants the unfortunate Peck?"

"It is me," cried our friend Wilful, delighted to find that Miss Peck was awake: "open the door immediately, my dearest Miss Peck, for I want to speak to you on business of great importance."

"To me, dear Mr. Wilful?" replied Peck, with great satisfaction; "I'm sure I shall be most happy to assist you with my poor opinion or services in any way that I can, but as to opening the door, my dear Mr. Wilful, I could not do it if I were to try ever so much; but if you would just try to lift it up a little yourself, my dear Mr. Wilful, I could soon squeeze myself out, being as you know, quite slender, and then you know

we could converse together very pleasantly, and there would be no danger of our being interrupted by Cock-a-doodle, who is always waking up for those foolish crows of his, which he is particular about, as if anybody in the world cared whether he crowed or not. He says that his family have always crowed exactly in the same way for hundreds of years, and it was awful to see the rage he was in with that scamp, young Strutaway, a few nights ago, because he said that he crowed out of time; but if Strutaway never did any thing worse than that, it would not much signify, in my opinion, for I think it is very shocking to see clever young people going on doing all the silly old things that were done, for want of knowing better, before their time.

As for Cock-a-doodle, I look upon him as little better than a lunatic, and a spiteful, domineering, barbarous old tyrant into the bargain."

Here Miss Peck was interrupted by seeing a little bit of Wilful's nose pushed in under the door ; for whilst she had been chattering he had been scraping and scraping, till he had succeeded in moving it, and now he thought that if Miss Peck would try, she could get out of the henhouse, for he was in a great hurry to tell her of his discovery. So Miss Peck did try ; and after a great deal of squeezing, and scrambling, and pushing, and choking, she found herself safe on the outside, with very rumpled feathers, but in great triumph at the thought of being safe out of Cock-a-doodle's clutches.

Wilful lost not a moment in telling her his wonderful news; and when she had heard it, Miss Peck quite agreed with him that the only step to be taken was, if possible, instantly to inform the Queen; "and if a messenger is wanted, you know, Mr. Wilful," she added, "that I am ready always to devote my poor services to the good of the public without looking for any reward, which, indeed, in this wicked world, so full of selfish Cock-a-doodles, and all kinds of malice and hatred, one would certainly look for in vain."

"Very, true, indeed, my dear Miss Peck," interrupted Wilful, who, being fond of talking himself, was always very impatient of Miss Peck's discourses; "very true, indeed: but allow me to

hint that it is not quite the thing for a young person like yourself to be travelling about the world alone; but, as I have made up my own mind to start immediately, without waiting till my mother and all the old people here are awake, I was going to propose that you should accompany me, and then, you know, I should have the pleasure of your society on the road, and you could give the weight of your respectable authority to the account which it is my duty to lay before her gracious majesty the Queen."

To this Miss Peck making no objection, but, on the contrary, expressing herself to be extremely pleased with the arrangement, they set off that instant, across the yard, down the meadow, and

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into the lane, without meeting with any difficulty or hindrance; only that Wilful ran so fast that Miss Peck had a hard matter to keep up with him, and would have ventured to say as much if it had been any one else; but Wilful was such a touchy gentleman, she knew he would not bear to be found fault with. However, in the lane they came to a standstill immediately, from not being agreed as to which was the right way to turn, Wilful maintaining that the way to the left led to the Queen's house, and Miss Peck being equally positive that they ought to go to the right.

"Really, Miss Peck," said the former, "I do wonder at a person of your talent being so uncommonly silly. Do not you know that all the blue butchers live

down the lane to the right; and is it likely that the Queen's house would be any where in that part of the country?"

"Oh! as for that," replied Miss Peck, very sharply, "*I* do not pretend to know in what part of the country such vulgar, low creatures as blue butchers may live, whatever you may do; but I am quite certain that her most gracious majesty lives down the lane to the right, and therefore to the right, begging your pardon, I shall certainly go."

"Then you may go by yourself, and joy go with you, you conceited, obstinate, ridiculous old goose," said Wilful, who in his anger quite forgot all his politeness; and without a word more, they parted, he running off as fast as he could down the lane to the left, and Miss Peck taking

the opposite direction. What *her* adventures were may possibly be told some other time; *his*, I grieve to say, soon came to a very sad end.

He had travelled but a little way before he was stopped and accosted by some one whom he did not know, and of whom, in the uncertain light, he could see little but the shining of two round bright eyes, which looked somewhat fierce and dangerous. The stranger's manner, however, was civil; he apologised for stopping Wilful, and asked, in a voice of extreme politeness, "where he was going?" "I am going," said Wilful, plucking up his spirits at the thought of his own importance, and encouraged by the stranger's mode of addressing him, "I am going to tell the Queen

that the stars are all falling out of the sky."

"Indeed," said his new acquaintance, with a gesture of strong surprise. "If that is the case, I think I can be of service to you, for it happens that her most gracious majesty is now on a visit to me, and if you will do me the honour of allowing me to conduct you to my house, which is not far off, you can tell her this extraordinary and important news immediately."

Wilful was but a young pig, and had very little knowledge of the world. If he had been older and wiser, he would have distrusted the sincerity of Mr. Brush, for that was the stranger's name; but, as it was, he was quite taken in by his respectful politeness, and con-

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sented to accompany him with the greatest alacrity.

Away, therefore, they went together, at a great pace, over fields and through hedges and ditches, till they got into a great wood, so thick and tangled that Wilful found it very unpleasant travelling, and begged his companion to go a little slower.

"My dear sir," said the latter, "I have the pleasure to tell you that we are just arrived. Here is my house; pray walk in: the Queen will be delighted to see you."

Poor Wilful was dumb with astonishment. He could see nothing but a dark-looking hole, under the roots of some hazel-trees, which grew on a little ridge of earth just above him; and how the

Queen could possibly get in there, he could not imagine. A shudder passed over him, as the suspicion of his new friend's treachery darted into his mind, and in an agony of terror he crept into the hole, without speaking a word.

It need scarcely be added, that the Queen never received the message, and that the unfortunate messenger was never seen again. His afflicted mother, when she missed him, very early the next morning, could learn no news of him any where; and old Jack, whom of course she consulted in her trouble, was but a poor comforter, for he only shook his head, and said, in a very solemn manner, that he "always thought young Master Wilful would come to no good."

It is to be hoped that all such silly

little people as fancy themselves wiser than their elders and betters, may learn to correct themselves of such a proud and evil spirit, or we may be sure that cleverer heads than old Jack's may safely prophesy of them that they will come to no good.

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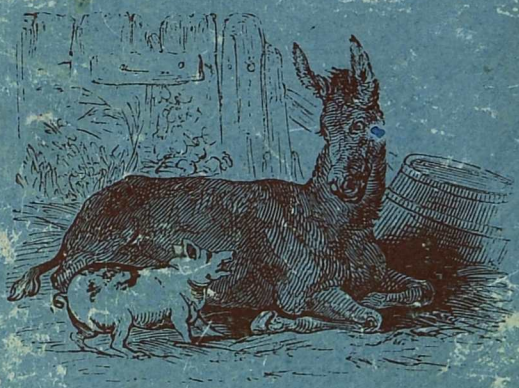
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