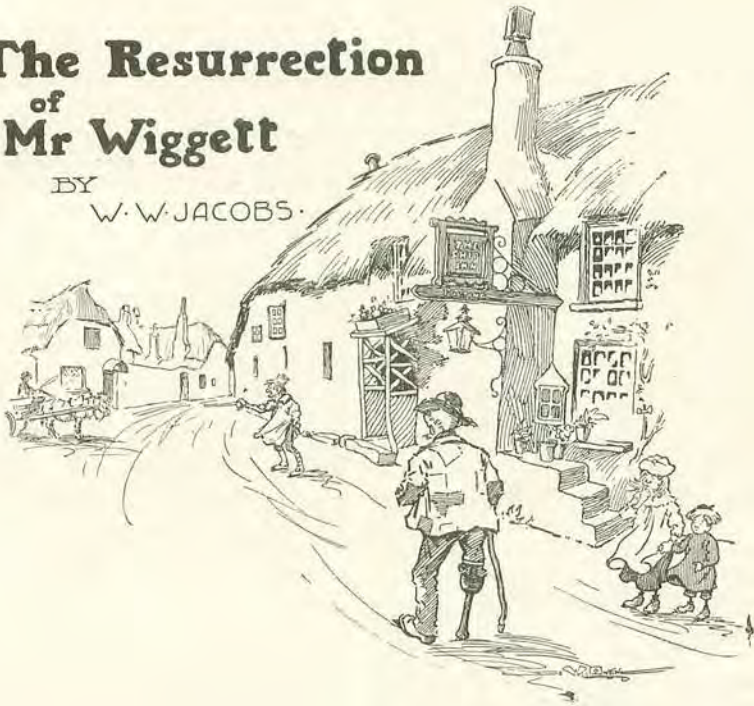


The Resurrection of Mr Wiggett

BY
W. W. JACOBS.



R. SOL KETCHMAID, landlord of the Ship, sat in his snug bar, rising occasionally from his seat by the taps to minister to the wants of the customers who shared this pleasant retreat with him.

Forty years at sea before the mast had made Mr. Ketchmaid an authority on affairs maritime; five years in command of the Ship Inn, with the nearest other licensed house five miles off, had made him an autocrat.

From his cushioned Windsor-chair he listened pompously to the conversation. Sometimes he joined in and took sides, and on these occasions it was a foregone conclusion that the side he espoused would win. No matter how reasonable the opponent's argument or how gross his personalities, Mr. Ketchmaid, in his capacity of host, had one unfailing rejoinder—the man was drunk. When Mr. Ketchmaid had pronounced that opinion the argument was at an end. A nervousness about his license—conspicuous at other times by its absence—would sud-

denly possess him, and opening the little wicket which gave admission to the bar, he would order the offender in scathing terms to withdraw.

Twice recently had he found occasion to warn Mr. Ned Clark, the village shoemaker, the strength of whose head had been a boast in the village for many years. On the third occasion the indignant shoemaker was interrupted in the middle of an impassioned harangue on free speech and bundled in the road by the ostler. After this nobody was safe.

To-night Mr. Ketchmaid, meeting his eye as he entered the bar, nodded curtly. The shoemaker had stayed away three days as a protest, and the landlord was naturally indignant at such contumacy.

"Good evening, Mr. Ketchmaid," said the shoemaker, screwing up his little black eyes; "just give me a small bottle o' lemonade, if you please."

Mr. Clark's cronies laughed, and Mr. Ketchmaid, after glancing at him to make sure that he was in earnest, served him in silence.

"There's one thing about lemonade," said the shoemaker, as he sipped it gingerly; "nobody could say you was drunk, not if you drank bucketsful of it."

There was an awkward silence, broken at last by Mr. Clark smacking his lips.

"Any news since I've been away, chaps?" he inquired; "or 'ave you just been sitting round as usual listening to the extra-ordinary adventures what happened to Mr. Ketchmaid whilst a-follering of the sea?"

"Truth is stranger than fiction, Ned," said Mr. Peter Smith, the tailor, reprovingly.

The shoemaker assented. "But I never thought so till I heard some o' the things Mr. Ketchmaid 'as been through," he remarked.

"Well, you know now," said the landlord, shortly.

"And the truthfulest of your yarns are the most wonderful of the lot, to my mind," said Mr. Clark.

"What do you mean by the truthfulest?" demanded the landlord, gripping the arms of his chair.

"Why, the strangest," grinned the shoemaker.

"Ah, he's been through a lot, Mr. Ketchmaid has," said the tailor.

"The truthfulest one to my mind," said the shoemaker, regarding the landlord with spiteful interest, "is that one where Henry Wiggett, the boatswain's mate, 'ad his leg bit off saving Mr. Ketchmaid from the shark, and 'is shipmate Sam Jones, the nigger cook, was wounded saving 'im from the South Sea Highlanders."

"I never get tired o' hearing that yarn," said the affable Mr. Smith.

"I do," said Mr. Clark.

Mr. Ketchmaid looked up from his pipe and eyed him darkly; the shoemaker smiled serenely.

"Another small bottle o' lemonade, landlord," he said, slowly.

"Go and get your lemonade somewhere else," said the bursting Mr. Ketchmaid.

"I prefer to 'ave it here," rejoined the shoemaker, "and you've got to serve me, Ketchmaid. A licensed publican is compelled to serve people whether he likes to or not, else he loses of 'is license."

"Not when they're the worse for lickie he ain't," said the landlord.

"Certainly not," said the shoemaker; "that's why I'm sticking to lemonade, Ketchmaid."

The indignant Mr. Ketchmaid removing the wire from the cork discharged the missile at the ceiling. The shoemaker took the glass from him and looked round with offensive slyness.

"Here's the 'ealth of Henry Wiggett what lost 'is leg to save Mr. Ketchmaid's life," he said, unctuously. "Also the 'ealth of Sam Jones, who let bisself be speared through the chest for the same noble purpose. Likewise the health of Captain Peters, who nursed Mr. Ketchmaid like 'is own son when he got knocked up doing the work of five men as was drowned; likewise the health o' Dick Lee, who helped Mr. Ketchmaid capture a Chinese junk full of pirates and killed the whole seventeen of 'em by—— 'Ow did you say you killed 'em, Ketchmaid?"

The landlord, who was busy with the taps, affected not to hear.

"Killed the whole seventeen of 'em by first telling 'em yarns till they fell asleep and



"THE LANDLORD AFFECTED NOT TO HEAR."

then choking 'em with Henry Wiggett's wooden leg," resumed the shoemaker.

"Kee—hee," said a hapless listener, explosively. "Kee—hee—kee——"

He checked himself, suddenly, and assumed an air of great solemnity as the landlord looked his way.

"You'd better go 'ome, Jem Summers," said the fuming Mr. Ketchmaid. "You're the worse for liker."

"I'm not," said Mr. Summers, stoutly.

"Out you go," said Mr. Ketchmaid, briefly. "You know my rules. I keep a respectable house, and them as can't drink in moderation are best outside."

"You should stick to lemonade, Jem," said Mr. Clark. "You can say what you like then."

Mr. Summers looked round for support, and then, seeing no pity in the landlord's eye, departed, wondering inwardly how he was to spend the remainder of the evening. The company in the bar gazed at each other soberly and exchanged whispers.

"Understand, Ned Clark," said the indignant Mr. Ketchmaid; "I don't want your money in this public-house. Take it somewhere else."

"Thankee, but I prefer to come here," said the shoemaker, ostentatiously sipping his lemonade. "I like to listen to your tales of the sea. In a quiet way I get a lot of amusement out of 'em."

"Do you disbelieve my word," demanded Mr. Ketchmaid, hotly.

"Why, o' course I do," replied the shoemaker; "we all do. You'd see how silly they are yourself if you only stopped to think. You and your sharks!—no shark would want to eat you unless it was blind."

Mr. Ketchmaid allowed this gross reflection on his personal appearance to pass unnoticed, and for the first of many evenings sat listening in torment as the shoemaker began the narration of a series of events which he claimed had happened to a seafaring nephew. Many of these bore a striking resemblance to Mr. Ketchmaid's own experiences, the only difference being that the nephew had no eye at all for the probabilities.

In this fell work Mr. Clark was ably assisted by the offended Mr. Summers. Side by side they sat and quaffed lemonade, and burlesqued the landlord's autobiography, the only consolation afforded to Mr. Ketchmaid consisting in the reflection that they were losing a harmless pleasure in good liquor. Once, and once only, they succumbed to the superior attractions of alcohol, and Mr.

Ketchmaid, returning from a visit to his brewer at the large seaport of Burnsea, heard from the ostler the details of a carouse with which he had been utterly unable to cope.

The couple returned to lemonade the following night, and remained faithful to that beverage until an event transpired which rendered further self-denial a mere foolishness.

It was about a week later, Mr. Ketchmaid had just resumed his seat after serving a customer, when the attention of all present was attracted by an odd and regular tapping on the brick-paved passage outside. It stopped at the tap-room, and a murmur of voices escaped at the open door. Then the door was closed, and a loud penetrating voice called on the name of Sol Ketchmaid.

"Good heavens!" said the amazed landlord, half-rising from his seat and falling back again. "I ought to know that voice."

"Sol Ketchmaid," bellowed the voice again; "where are you, shipmate?"

"Hennery Wiggett," gasped the landlord, as a small man with ragged whiskers appeared at the wicket; "it can't be!"

The new-comer regarded him tenderly for a moment without a word, and then, kicking open the door with an unmistakable wooden leg, stumped into the bar, and grasping his outstretched hand shook it fervently.

"I met Cap'n Peters in Melbourne," said the stranger, as his friend pushed him into his own chair, and questioned him breathlessly. "He told me where you was."

"The sight o' you, Hennery Wiggett, is better to me than diamonds," said Mr. Ketchmaid, ecstatically. "How did you get here?"

"A friend of his, Cap'n Jones, of the barque *Venus*, gave me a passage to London," said Mr. Wiggett, "and I've tramped down from there without a penny in my pocket."

"And Sol Ketchmaid's glad to see you, sir," said Mr. Smith, who, with the rest of the company, had been looking on in a state of great admiration. "He's never tired of telling us 'ow you saved him from the shark and 'ad your leg bit off in so doing."

"I'd 'ave my other bit off for 'im, too," said Mr. Wiggett, as the landlord patted him affectionately on the shoulder and thrust a glass of spirits into his hands. "Cheerful, I would. The kindest-earted and the bravest man that ever breathed, is old Sol Ketchmaid."

He took the landlord's hand again, and squeezing it affectionately, looked round the comfortable bar with much approval. They

began to converse in the low tones of confidence, and names which had figured in many of the landlord's stories fell continuously on the listeners' ears.

"You never 'eard anything more o' pore Sam Jones, I s'pose?" said Mr. Ketchmaid.

Mr. Wiggett put down his glass.

"I ran up ag'in a man in Rio Janeiro two years ago," he said, mournfully. "Pore old Sam died in 'is arms with your name upon 'is honest black lips."

"Enough to kill any man," muttered the discomfited Mr. Clark, looking round defiantly upon his murmuring friends.

"Who is this putty-faced swab, Sol?" demanded Mr. Wiggett, turning a fierce glance in the shoemaker's direction.

"He's our cobbler," said the landlord, "but you don't want to take no notice of 'im. Nobody else does. He's a man who as good as told me I'm a liar."

"Wot!" said Mr. Wiggett, rising and stumping across the bar; "take it back, mate. I've only got one leg, but nobody shall run down Sol while I can draw breath. The finest sailorman that ever trod a deck is Sol, and the best-'earted."

"Hear, hear," said Mr. Smith; "own up as you're in the wrong, Ned."

"When I was laying in my bunk in the fo'c's'le being nursed back to life," continued Mr. Wiggett, enthusiastically, "who was it that set by my side 'olding my 'and and telling me to live for his sake?—why, Sol Ketchmaid. Who was it that said he'd stick to me for life—why, Sol Ketchmaid. Who was it said that so long as 'e 'ad a crust I should have first bite at it, and so long as 'e 'ad a bed I should 'ave first half of it—why, Sol Ketchmaid!"

He paused to take breath, and a flattering murmur arose from his listeners, while the subject of his discourse looked at him as though his eloquence was in something of the nature of a surprise even to him.

"In my old age and on my beam-ends," continued Mr. Wiggett, "I remembered them words of old Sol, and I knew if I could only find 'im my troubles were over. I knew that I could creep into 'is little harbour and lay

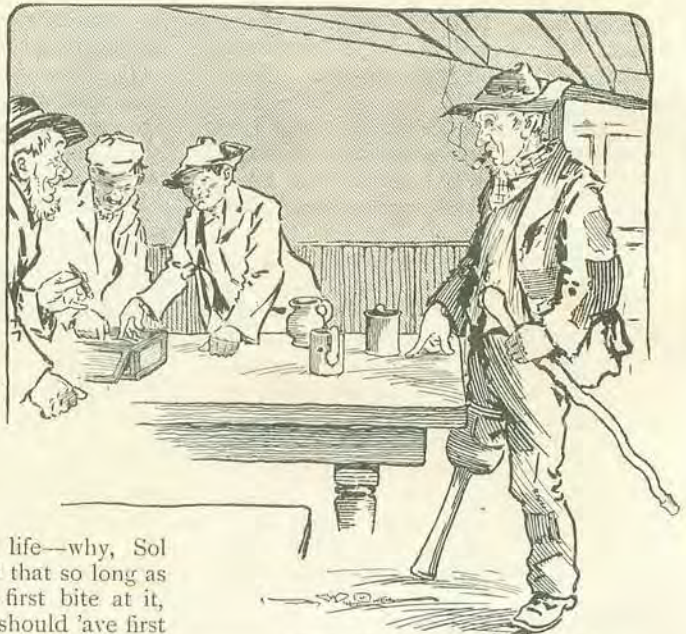
snug. I knew that what Sol said he meant. I lost my leg saving 'is life, and he is grateful."

"So he ought to be," said Mr. Clark, "and I'm proud to shake 'ands with a hero."

He gripped Mr. Wiggett's hand, and the others followed suit. The wooden-legged man wound up with Mr. Ketchmaid, and, disdaining to notice that that voracious mariner's grasp was somewhat limp, sank into his chair again and asked for a cigar.

"Lend me the box, Sol," he said, jovially, as he took it from him. "I'm going to 'and 'em round. This is my treat, mates. Pore old Henry Wiggett's treat."

He passed the box round, Mr. Ketchmaid watching in helpless indignation as the customers, discarding their pipes, thanked Mr. Wiggett warmly, and helped themselves to a threepenny cigar apiece. Mr. Clark



"PORE OLD HENRY WIGGETT'S TREAT."

was so particular that he spoilt at least two by undue pinching before he could find one to his satisfaction.

Closing time came all too soon, Mr. Wiggett, whose popularity was never for a moment in doubt, developing gifts to which his friend had never even alluded. He sang comic songs in a voice which made the glasses rattle on the shelves, asked some

really clever riddles, and wound up with a conjuring trick which consisted in borrowing half a crown from Mr. Ketchmaid and making it pass into the pocket of Mr. Peter Smith. This last was perhaps not quite so satisfactory, as the utmost efforts of the tailor failed to discover the coin, and he went home under a cloud of suspicion which nearly drove him frantic.

"I 'ope you're satisfied," said Mr. Wiggett, as the landlord, having shot the bolts of the front door, returned to the bar.

"You went a bit too far," said Mr. Ketchmaid, shortly; "you should ha' been content with doing what I told you to do. And who asked you to 'and my cigars round?"

"I got a bit excited," pleaded the other.

"And you forgot to 'tell 'em you're going to start to-morrow to live with that niece of yours in New Zealand," added the landlord.

"So I did," said Mr. Wiggett, smiting his forehead; "so I did. I'm very sorry; I'll tell 'em to-morrow night."

"Mention it casual like, to-morrow morning," commanded Mr. Ketchmaid, "and get off in the artemoon, then I'll give you some dinner besides the five shillings as arranged."

Mr. Wiggett thanked him warmly and, taking a candle, withdrew to the unwonted luxury of clean sheets and a soft bed. For some time he lay awake in deep thought and then, smothering a laugh with the bed-clothes, he gave a sigh of content and fell asleep.

To the landlord's great annoyance his guest went for a walk next morning and did not return until the evening, when he explained that he had walked too far for his crippled condition and was unable to get back. Much sympathy was manifested for him in the bar, but in all the conversation that ensued Mr. Ketchmaid listened in vain for any hint of his departure. Signals were of no use, Mr. Wiggett merely nodding amiably and raising his glass in response; and when by considerable strategy he brought the conversation from pig-killing to nieces, Mr. Wiggett deftly transferred it to uncles and discoursed on pawnbroking.

The helpless Mr. Ketchmaid suffered in silence, with his eye on the clock, and almost danced with impatience at the tardiness of his departing guests. He accompanied the last man to the door, and then, crimson with rage, returned to the bar to talk to Mr. Wiggett.

"Wot d'y'r mean by it?" he thundered.

"Mean by what, Sol?" inquired Mr. Wiggett, looking up in surprise.

"Don't you call me Sol, 'cos I won't have it," vociferated the landlord, standing over him with his fist clenched. "First thing to-morrow morning off you go."

"Off?" repeated the other, in amazement. "Off? Where to?"

"Anywhere," said the overwrought landlord; "so long as you get out of here, I don't care where you go."

Mr. Wiggett, who was smoking a cigar, the third that evening, laid it carefully on the table by his side, and regarded him with tender reproach.

"You ain't yourself, Sol," he said, with conviction; "don't say another word else you might say things you'll be sorry for."

His forebodings were more than justified, Mr. Ketchmaid indulging in a few remarks about his birth, parentage, and character which would have shocked an East-end policeman.

"First thing to-morrow morning you go," he concluded, fiercely. "I've a good mind to turn you out now. You know the arrangement I made with you."

"Arrangement!" said the mystified Mr. Wiggett; "what arrangement? Why, I ain't seen you for ten years and more. If it 'adn't been for meeting Cap'n Peters——"

He was interrupted by frenzied and incoherent exclamations from Mr. Ketchmaid.

"Sol Ketchmaid," he said, with dignity, "I 'ope you're drunk. I 'ope it's the drink and not Sol Ketchmaid, wot I saved from the shark by 'aving my leg bit off, talking. I saved your life, Sol, an' I 'ave come into your little harbour and let go my little anchor to stay there till I go aloft to join poor Sam Jones wot died with your name on 'is lips."

He sprang suddenly erect as Mr. Ketchmaid, with a loud cry, snatched up a bottle and made as though to brain him with it.

"You rascal," said the landlord, in a stifled voice. "You infernal rascal. I never set eyes on you till I saw you the other day on the quay at Burnsea, and, just for an innercent little joke like with Ned Clark, asked you to come in and pretend."

"Pretend!" repeated Mr. Wiggett, in a horror-stricken voice. "Pretend! Have you forgotten me pushing you out of the way and saying, 'Save yourself, Sol,' as the shark's jaws clashed together over my leg? Have you forgotten 'ow——?"

"Look 'ere," said Mr. Ketchmaid, thrust-

ing an infuriated face close to his, "there never was a Henery Wiggett; there never was a shark; there never was a Sam Jones!"

"Never—was—a—Sam Jones!" said the dazed Mr. Wiggett, sinking into his chair. "Ain't you got a spark o' proper feeling left, Sol?"

He fumbled in his pocket, and producing the remains of a dirty handkerchief wiped his eyes to the memory of the faithful black.



"HE WIPED HIS EYES TO THE MEMORY OF THE FAITHFUL BLACK."

"Look here," said Mr. Ketchmaid, putting down the bottle and regarding him intently, "you've got me fair. Now, will you go for a pound?"

"Got you?" said Mr. Wiggett, severely; "I'm ashamed of you, Sol. Go to bed and sleep off the drink, and in the morning you can take Henry Wiggett's 'and, but not before."

He took a box of matches from the bar and, re-lighting the stump of his cigar, contemplated Mr. Ketchmaid for some time in silence, and then, with a serious shake of his head, stumped off to bed. Mr. Ketchmaid remained below, and for at least an hour sat thinking of ways and means out of the dilemma into which his ingenuity had led him.

He went to bed with the puzzle still

unsolved, and the morning yielded no solution. Mr. Wiggett appeared to have forgotten the previous night's proceedings altogether, and steadfastly declined to take umbrage at a manner which would have chilled a rhinoceros. He told several fresh anecdotes of himself and Sam Jones that evening; anecdotes which, at the imminent risk of choking, Mr. Ketchmaid was obliged to endorse.

A week passed, and Mr. Wiggett still graced with his presence the bar of the Ship. The landlord lost flesh, and began seriously to consider the advisability of making a clean breast of the whole affair. Mr. Wiggett watched him anxiously, and with a skill born of a life-long study of humanity, realized that his visit was drawing to an end. At last, one day, Mr. Ketchmaid put the matter bluntly.

"I shall tell the chaps to-night that it was a little joke on my part," he announced, with grim decision; "then I shall take you by the collar and kick you into the road."

Mr. Wiggett sighed and shook his head.

"It'll be a terrible show-up for you," he said, softly. "You'd better make it worth my while, and I'll tell 'em this evening that I'm going to New Zealand to live with a niece of mine there, and that you've paid my passage for me. I don't like telling any more lies, but, seeing it's for you, I'll do it for a couple of pounds."

"Five shillings," snarled Mr. Ketchmaid.

Mr. Wiggett smiled comfortably and shook his head. Mr. Ketchmaid raised his offer to ten shillings, to a pound, and finally, after a few remarks which prompted Mr. Wiggett to state that hard words broke no bones, flung into the bar and fetched the money.

The news of Mr. Wiggett's departure went round the village at once, the landlord himself breaking the news to the next customer, and an overflow meeting assembled that evening to bid the emigrant farewell.

The landlord noted with pleasure that business was brisk. Several gentlemen stood drink to Mr. Wiggett, and in return he put his hand in his own pocket and ordered glasses round. Mr. Ketchmaid, in a state of some uneasiness, took the order, and then Mr. Wiggett, with the air of one conferring inestimable benefits, produced a lucky half-

penny, which had once belonged to Sam Jones, and insisted upon his keeping it.

"This is my last night, mates," he said, mournfully, as he acknowledged the drink-

"Ketchmaid told me hisself as he'd paid your passage to New Zealand," said the shoemaker; "he said as 'e'd pressed you to stay, but that you said as blood was thicker even than friendship."



"BREAKING THE NEWS."

ing of his health. "In many ports I've been, and many snug pubs I've visited, but I never in all my days come across a nicer, kinder-hearted lot o' men than wot you are."

"Hear, hear," said Mr. Clark.

Mr. Wiggett paused, and, taking a sip from his glass to hide his emotion, resumed.

"In my lonely pilgrimage through life, crippled, and 'aving to beg my bread," he said, tearfully, "I shall think o' this 'appy bar and these friendly faces. When I am wrestlin' with the pangs of 'unger and being moved on by the 'eartless police, I shall think of you as I last saw you."

"But," said Mr. Smith, voicing the general consternation, "you're going to your niece in New Zealand?"

Mr. Wiggett shook his head and smiled a sad, sweet smile.

"I 'ave no niece," he said, simply; "I'm alone in the world."

At these touching words his audience put their glasses down and stared in amaze at Mr. Ketchmaid, while that gentleman in his turn gazed at Mr. Wiggett as though he had suddenly developed horns and a tail.

"All lies," said Mr. Wiggett, sadly. "I'll stay with pleasure if he'll give the word. I'll stay even now if 'e wishes it."

He paused a moment as though to give his bewildered victim time to accept this offer, and then addressed the scandalized Mr. Clark again.

"He don't like my being 'ere," he said, in a low voice. "He grudges the little bit I eat, I s'pose. He told me I'd got to go, and that for the look o' things 'e was going to pretend I was going to New Zealand. I was too broke-hearted at the time to care wot he said—I 'ave no wish to sponge on no man—but, seeing your 'onest faces round me I couldn't go with a lie on my lips—Sol Ketchmaid, old shipmate—good-bye."

He, turned to the speechless landlord, made as though to shake hands with him, thought better of it, and then, with a wave of his hand full of chastened dignity, withdrew. His stump rang with pathetic insistence upon the brick-paved passage, paused at the door, and then, tapping on the hard road, died slowly away in the distance. Inside the Ship the shoemaker gave an ominous order for lemonade.