

## Some Old Riddle-Books.



WHEN is a jar not a door? When it's partly open." We forget who it was, bored with the repetition of the venerable conundrum, who took refuge in this perversion; and we never knew who invented the original. But this latter malefactor is dead now, and no earthly punishment is possible beyond the perversion perpetrated by the less dangerous criminal. It is sad to realize that once on a time that pitiful, doleful thing, the average conundrum, was regarded as the true essence of wit, and was handed down through generations who were always ready for it with a fresh grin. And our great-grandfathers were not fools; on the contrary, some of them might have taught a trifle or two of wisdom to some of us—even the youngest of us—had circumstances permitted of a personal meeting. But their conundrums and their riddles! But, there, let us not crow too loudly. For some of those same sad-denying questions have come down to us, and it has even been said (though we refuse to believe it) that books of conundrums have been bought quite recently.

To attempt to trace riddles to an origin would be an impossible task, and no part of our present intention. Riddles have been ever since man has been. But the farther back we go, the duller the riddles seem—by the dimness of distance, probably. And, indeed, if we go but to the beginning of the last century they seem dull enough. About that time was published: "The Puzzle;

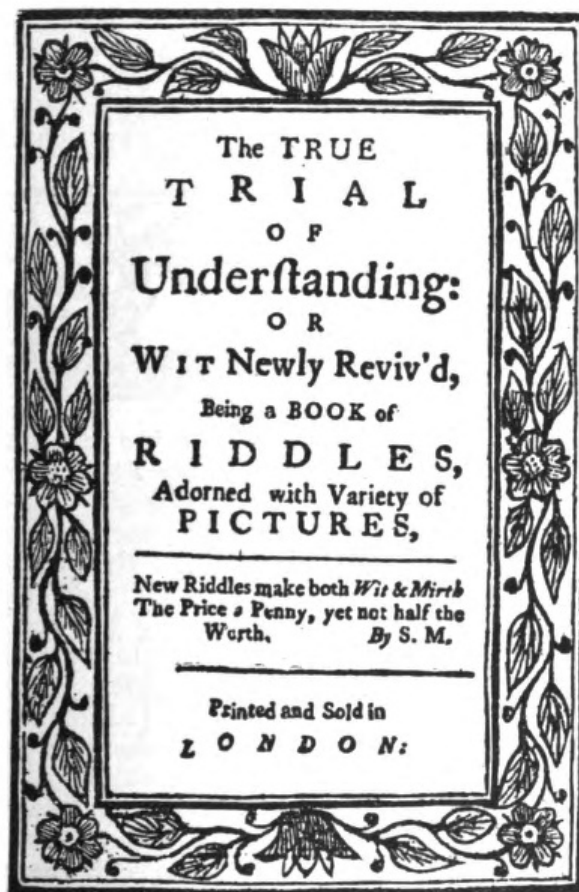
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being a choice collection of conundrums." There were 500 conundrums in this book—but no answers. The publisher was a smart man. To get the answer it was necessary to buy another book: "The Nuts Cracked," which was made up of answers and nothing else. But really, if one but dipped into the pages, there was little temptation to buy either. "Why is a picture like a member of Parliament? Because it is a representative"; and, "Why is a well like a lock? Because it has a spring." These are specimens of the conundrums, and neither is particularly inspiring.

We give the title-page of a book of illustrated riddles published about this time: "The True Trial of Understanding." You may observe a couplet by way of motto, to which the author with natural pride has placed his initials, whereby we learn that the lines are "By S. M." When you have read the couplet you will wonder that the poet did not give his whole name, and, perhaps, for the sake of literature, you will be sorry.

We proceed to extract a few of the riddles from this book, in facsimile. Here you have answer and all, with an illustration thrown in for each riddle—a beautiful illustration, as anybody may see. The question is

always in verse, but the answer is plain prose. The first we give is from page 4. The verse is a bit out of repair, and the feet seem to have got out of some lines and squeezed into others, where the poetry very naturally tumbles over them, and falls rather flat. But



( 4 )

**Q.** The greatest travellers that e'er were known  
By sea and land were mighty archers twain ;  
No armor proof, or fenced walls of stone,  
Could turn their arrows, bulwarks were in vain  
Thro' princes courts, and kingdoms far and  
near,

As well in foreign parts as Christendom,  
These travellers their weary steps then steer,  
But to the deserts seldom come.



*A. 'Tis Death and Cupid, whose Arrows  
pierce thro' the walls of Brass, or strong Armour  
in all Courts and Kingdoms in the habitable  
world*

it is capital poetry for the price (the book cost at first a few pence only, though it is worth more now), and it is easier to understand than many more expensive qualities. But the picture is the interesting thing. It represents Death and Cupid and an Isosceles Triangle. The Isosceles Triangle isn't in the conundrum—it is given away as a supplement. At that time, it will be observed, Death not only struck people down with his arrows (that thing *is* an arrow, not an anchor), but he also dug their graves. (The other

**Q** Two Calves and an Ape  
They made their escape  
From one that was worse than a spright ;  
They travell'd together  
In all sorts of weather,  
But often were put in a fright.



*A. 'Tis a Man flying from his scolding wife ;  
the two calves and an Ape signify the calves  
of the Legs and the Nape of his Neck, which  
by travelling was expos'd to the Weather.*

thing is a spade.) This was only fair. Nowadays we have to pay regular gravediggers. As for Cupid—but, there, look at him.

The "Two Calves and an Ape" riddle was a favourite one, and it reappears in various forms in many old riddle-books. The legend can be read in our facsimile, and again the picture is a handsome one. Nobody could blame the unfortunate husband for flying from a wife with such a pair of hands as those ; nor could wonder at his dropping his hat and wig as he went. It is a noble wig, of majestic proportions—unless it is a nubbly boulder hurled after the fugitive by the fair pursuer.

Next we have a riddle expressed in four lines, in the second of which a touch of Kailyard dialect saves the whole thing from falling ruinously out of rhyme. It is a thin and weakly puzzle on the whole, but the hog is all right in the picture, and anything but

**Q.** To the green wood  
Full oft it hath gang'd,  
Yet yields us no good,  
'Till decently hang'd.



*A. It is a Hog fattened with Acorns, which  
makes good Bacon when hanged a drying.*

thin. His tail curls elegantly, and with his opposite extremity he sniffs at a lusty oak tree, nearly 3ft. high, bearing three acorns about the size of turnips, as well as several distinct leaves. The sagacious animal is cautiously judging the strength of the trunk before climbing its giddy height in search of those acorns.

Now we have the whole of page 12, with two riddles and their sumptuous engravings complete. It is intended as no disrespect to the author of the verses when we say that the main interest of this page lies in the pictures. In the top one the sun, disguised as a sweep's broom, frowns discontentedly on the agricultural proceedings below. An undertaker's horse, of undue corpulence, peeps slyly over its shoulder and winks at a dilapidated lump of garden fence. A

hatless rustic (or a piece of one) stands at the rear of this piece of fence, and from the answer to the riddle you gather that he intends using it as a plough. But the obese steed in front is wiser, and he winks again—with the other eye. Then below we have Samson slaying a thousand men with the ass's jawbone. Samson has forgotten his hat—it seems a pretty general fashion in this book—but his wig is all right, and though he is a bit knock-kneed, his broad-skirted,

( 12 )

**Q.** To ease men of their care,  
I do both rend and tear  
Their mother's bowels still :  
Yet tho' I do,  
There are but few  
That seem to take it ill.



**A.** 'Tis a Plough, which breaks up the bowels  
of the Earth for the sowing of Corn.

**Q.** I liv'd and dy'd : then after death,  
Bereav'd some hundreds of their breath,  
Afflicted by a man of grief,  
To whom it yielded some relief.



**A.** 'Tis Sampson's Jawbone of an Ass, with  
which he slew a thousand Men, and was relieve'd  
himself by water springing from the same, when  
he was thirsty.

eighteenth-century coat is well supplied with buttons, as, indeed, is that of the Philistine at present being operated on. Samson whangs this person merrily over the head with his weapon (which certainly looks *rather* like a fox's tail), cordially shaking hands with him the while. This seems a little inconsistent, but the Philistine doesn't seem to mind, and looks casually out of the picture as though he found the performance rather dull. A second Philistine is waiting his turn just behind, reclining comfortably so as not to disturb his full-bottomed wig. The other

By sparks of lawn fine?  
I am lustily drawn,  
But not in a chariot or coach :  
I fly in a word  
More swift than a bird,  
That does the green forest approach.



**A.** An Arrow drawn in a Bow by a Gentleman Archer.

998 Philistines are not visible ; probably they have been finished off and buried out of hand. But from the two remaining we may learn many interesting lessons as to the costume and habits and wigs of the early Philistines, to say nothing of Samson himself.

There is a picture in this book of a "gentleman archer." Probably by way of symbolizing his social distinction he is accorded the honour of a hat—an honour almost unique in the volume. He plants his legs very deep in the ground—half-way to the knee almost—and shoots valiantly at five rush-leaves—shoots standing full a yard and a half away, to give the rush-leaves a fair chance. His bow is of the Cupid pattern, and his arrow of the death design, as already exhibited in the "greatest travellers" riddle on page 4. A view of the Needles rocks is to be perceived in the background, though you may consider them trees without extra charge.

In the "Mermaid" riddle we have another

**Q.** A visage fair,  
And voice is rare,  
Affording pleasant charms ;  
Which is with us  
Most ominous,  
Prefaging future harms.



**A.** A Mermaid, which besakens destruction  
to Mariners.



subtle dodge of the poet's to catch the publisher's eye, and hint to him his lamentable lack of beer, and of the wherewithal to buy it? At any rate, the herring is plain enough, though the hypocritical might object that it

**Q.** I have a head, but ne'er an eye,  
I have no legs, but wings to fly;  
When on an errand I am sent,  
I cleave the very element.



**A.** A Sculler's Boat, the water's the Element, the Scullers are the wings.

is swimming *on* the sea rather than in it. But the sea is very nicely combed out, like the mermaid's sea in the other book, and after looking at the picture nobody will need to be told the reason of the slang expression that dubs a bloater a "crocodile."

A page or two farther in the book we find the "Boat" riddle. Here we observe that the sea is coarser, and not nearly so well combed. Perhaps that is why it is referred to in the verse as the "very element." If it had only been the "rather" element it might have been more regular in its habits. For "scullers" in the second line of the answer, one should read "sculls"; though in the picture the weapon of propulsion seems rather to be one of the flexible laths used by harlequins. But there is merit in the representation of the jolly young waterman, and nobody can fail to recognise the boat as what is technically known as a "trim-built wherry."

Later we arrive at the "Pillory" riddle.

Here the poetry is of superior workmanship. The rhymes nobody can impugn, and the lines are almost free from lameness—just a trifle stiff in the joints, perhaps, but no more. Observe the fine imagery of the third line. "Many persons to him flow'd." "Flow'd" is admirable. In the picture three gentlemen are about to fling things at the victim, but they all obligingly stop and pose in

**Q.** There was a fight near Charing Cross,  
A creature almost like a horse;  
But when I came the beast to see,  
The head was where the Tail should be.



**A.** A Mare tied with her tail to the Manger.

position for the artist to draw the picture. The victim himself also composes his features, and looks as pleasant as possible while his portrait is being taken. A gentleman with no arms finds it difficult to fling anything on his own account, so leans against the side of the picture for safety (having only one leg).

We have rather a famous puzzle in the next we reproduce. A well-known "sell" show at fairs, down to quite recent times, was the "wonderful horse, with his head where his tail ought to be." The innocent who parted with their pennies were presented to a very

**Q.** Promotion lately was bestow'd  
Upon a person mean and small;  
Then many persons to him flow'd,  
Yet he return'd no thanks at all;  
But yet their hands were ready still,  
To help him with their kind good-will.



**A.** It is a Man pelted in the Pillory.

ordinary sort of quadruped, with its tail turned to a corn-bin. Being thus made wise, they said nothing to their friends outside, except to persuade them also to pay their pennies and be sold, which was very grateful of them, and good business for the show-man. The mare in the present example is with difficulty repressing a very excusable smile. She stands nobly to attention, and only lacks a pair of rockers to put her completely in character.

And so we come to page 12. Here the poetry is a trifle irregular, and is apt to cause hiccoughs if one attempts to read it off trippingly. But once more the picture saves the situation. Observe the cheerful whiteness of the gloomy night, and the easy non-

( 12 )  
 Q As I walked thro' the streets,  
 It was near twelve o'clock at night ;  
 Two all in black I chanc'd to meet,  
 Their eyes like flaming fire bright  
 They pass'd by, nothing said,  
 Therefore I was not much afraid.



A. Two long lighted Links carried along the Street.

Q Three men near the flowing Thames,  
 Much pains and labour they did take ;  
 They did both scratch and claw their wems  
 Until their very hearts did ache.

It is as true as e'er was told,  
 Therefore this Riddle now unfold.



A. Three Fiddlers in Thames-Street, who played up a bridegroom in the Morning, who gave them nothing to drink.

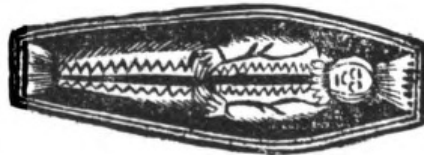
chance wherewith the two linkmen brandish their flaming torches. Neither of them is swinging a leg of mutton round on a string, as inconsiderate persons have supposed; nor are they about to batter each other with knobby clubs, as other superficial students are apt to imagine. They are simply lighting up that black night with flaming links, and with so much success as to whiten the sky as though it had been lime-washed.

The next riddle gives us a bright and airy view of Thames Street, on an early

morning, when three misguided fiddlers spoiled their own rest and that of a bridegroom by fiddling in a vague hope of eleemosynary drinks. Every right-minded person will be delighted to know that they did not get those drinks, though regretful to find no mention of a brick or a boot-jack; either of which articles might with propriety have been contributed by the

Q Full forty years I once did live,  
 And oftentimes I food did give ;  
 Yet all that time I did not roam  
 So much as half a mile from home ;  
 But I liv'd free from care and strife,  
 'Till at last I lost my life.

Expound this Riddle out of hand,  
 The owner hath no house nor land.



A The suits of Crape bestowed upon a deceased Body; the House is the Coffin, the Land is the Grave and he knoweth not that he possesses either.

neighbours. It will be observed that all three fiddlers are left-handed. This may account for a certain perversity of habit, and some unreasonableness of expectation; but it does not excuse the supine endurance of the bridegroom, nor the disgracefully mountainous state of the public street wherein the fiddlers stand.

The lugubrious merriment of this "Merry Book" (*vide* title-page) is carried on fittingly in the next riddle we print, cheerfully illustrated with a picture of a discontented-looking corpse in a coffin.

One can sympathize even with a corpse unwillingly associated with such a dull and clumsy riddle, and truly, to be shoved into the middle of such a doleful performance on a page of public print might bring a discontented scowl to the brow of the most naturally genial corpse; to say nothing of the unnecessarily aggravating flower-pot hat. The first four lines of the verse seem to be an extremely obscure, muddled, and misinformed allusion to the silk worm.

Perhaps the next riddle is the best of the lot in conception.

**Q.** I saw five birds all in a cage,  
Each bird had but one single wing,  
They were an hundred years of age:  
And yet fly and sweetly sing,  
The wonder did my mind possess,  
When I beheld her age and strength:  
Besides, as near as I can guess,  
Their tails were thirty feet in length.



A. A Peel of Bells in a Steeple.

worthy, respectable row of men, these ringers, though not strikingly handsome, and one trusts that when the bells *do* swing right side up they will miss their heads by a little, hopeless as the chance seems.

After the bells we have the sun, as it appears on the fire-office plates. It is a healthy-looking, well-fed sun, with a nose like the ace of clubs, a dimpled chin, a pious smile, and a rebellious head of hair. But the riddle is uncommonly poor and flat, even among the other poor and flat riddles.

( 23 )

**Q.** At once I am in France and Spain,  
And likewise many nations more,  
While I am in my gloomy reign,  
I give the world a mighty store.



A. The SUN.