



"THE ANCIENT MARINER."
(A sketch in the Mile End Road.)

THE VAGABONDS' MUSEUM.

BY T. ARTEMUS JONES.

Illustrated by MATT STRETCH.



WHILST most people are aware of the Museum of Criminal Curiosities at Scotland Yard, very few, indeed, have heard of the no less extraordinary collection of beggars' stock-in-trade exhibited by the London Society for the Suppression of Mendicity, which was founded somewhere about the year 1815.

Yet along the walls of its premises in Fisher Street, Red Lion Square, you may see some wonderful pictorial and literary appeals of the professional beggar to the benevolent.

Through all the productions, however, runs a strong family likeness, indicating that they are the outcome of the same artists and the same establishment. Somewhere in London there is a studio, indeed, where these things are manufactured, but its exact locality has so far escaped detection, even of the four officers employed by the society I have named.

It was the great Duke of Wellington himself who first grappled with the difficulty of suppressing the professional beggar. Following the close of the great war a great mass

of poverty prevailed in London, and the Iron Duke was doubtless prompted to embark upon a career of society-promoting by the ingenuity displayed by the professional beggar in misdirecting charity. With the assistance of others of the nobility who were benevolently disposed he soon succeeded in establishing the organization, the London Mendicity Society; and no one who has seen even the least important aspect of its work since that time can doubt that it has justified its existence.

For no less than 67,000 street beggars have been apprehended by the officers of the society—who, being sworn in as constables, still retain the power of arresting a beggar both in the city and the metropolis—and its collection of begging letters numbers no less than 220,000! Its classification of professional beggars, too, is no trifling contribution to social history.



SHAMMING A FIT.

professors of begging-letter writing ply their obnoxious trade in London at the present time. So active are they in the pursuance of their business, that two officers are kept specially by the society to look after this department of the work.

Day by day subscribers to the society, all of whom are interested in philanthropy, forward to headquarters the begging letters they have received, and the whereabouts of the writers are then ascertained by the two officers. More often than not the communications are traced to a professional source, and when compared continually reveal indications of the same hand.

Many of the letters are models of ingenuity. The custom of this class of impostors is to make a dozen or twenty copies, and to leave these at as many houses, calling in a day or two for the reply. Some practise this art exclusively on naval and military officers, on the strength of the representation that they served in the same regiment. As a rule they present a respectable appearance, and can be seen haunting clubdom. Others again prefer the petition form, which is often very successful.

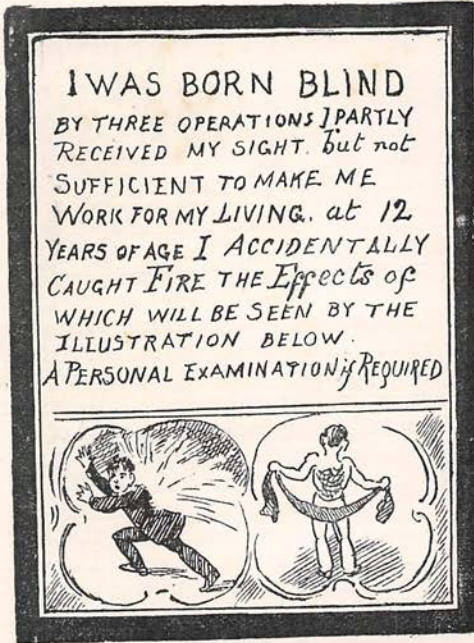
The most numerous type of sham cripples consists of blind men. The blind beggar, his chest covered by a card, holding a small tin cup in one hand and feeling his way with a stick along the pavement, used to be a far more familiar object in the London streets than he is now. As an institution he has



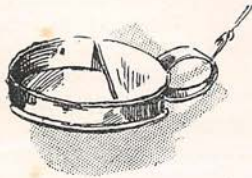
MIRACLE

The significance of this phase of its work may appear small, but its realization is helped by the fact that no less than 500 recognized

been outpaced by more ingenious pretexs, and now he is rarely found in practice except in the suburbs.



His downfall no doubt is due to the ludicrous position in which he found himself when he happened to lose his presence of mind. This always occurred when a roguish butcher boy, passing by, pretended to make a grab at his tin can. With extraordinary suddenness the blind man's sight became restored, and although, according to the card, he had been lame and sightless for many years, he lost no time in pursuing the urchin.



A keeper of one of those common lodging-houses whence nearly all the sham cripples of the metropolis emanate, told me several amusing anecdotes. His house, standing on the south side of Mile End Road, is known as the "scriver's factory." A "scriver" is the artist who produces the cards, and if he succeeds in turning out inscriptions as appeals that catch the fancy of the public, he has little difficulty in living comfortably. If he happens to be very ignorant, or afflicted with a twisted sense of humour, he raises considerable disturbance at the "padden ken" (the beggar's private name for lodging-

house), and brings his clients into the police court as well.

One of these my informant remembered in particular. His card bore the words, "Served under Wellington at the Indian Mutiny," with the addition that the sham soldier was also present "at the deadly battle of Singapore." In addition to having one of his legs strapped up and a wooden stump fixed beneath, he bore several medals (manufactured, with other things, at the factory), and was soon surrounded by a roaring crowd.

On the very same day another unfortunate vagabond went out, and took up a position in Cheapside, his card bearing the words, "Sixty-three years of age. Blinded at Waterloo." The jeers of the crowd that soon gathered restored his sight instantaneously. These incidents explained the "rumpus," as the keeper termed it, that disturbed the peace of his household the same night.

The most disagreeable, if ingenious, of all devices is perhaps pursued by the fainting-fit artist. In the thick of the throng that moves along the Strand or Holborn he suddenly

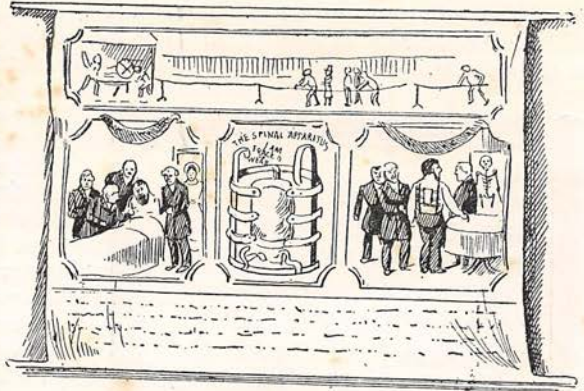


RESCUED FROM CRIME.
 (A London Mendicity Society officer and his charges.)

falls down on the pavement, foaming at the mouth. It may be that the froth is produced by a small piece of soap which he chews; but the distress it is supposed to indicate has

its effect on the sympathy of the crowd. A benevolent by-stander fetches a dose of brandy, and this kindness is followed by several shillings and coppers that are thrown at him. As often as not a cab is called to convey him to the hospital, but the brandy has brought him round, and he moves painfully away—to re-enact the part in another spot.

But the most interesting curiosities gathered together by the Society are the poetical and pictorial productions of the professional beggar. An hour spent in the gallery on the third floor of the Society's buildings steels the tenderest heart against the supplications of the distressed and suffering. The first feature of the gallery which catches the observant eye is the recurrence of the same themes,



the favourite dodge for evoking sympathy and coins. In the accompanying illustration the man professes to be a sailor, and the picture depicts his own bravery. It is divided

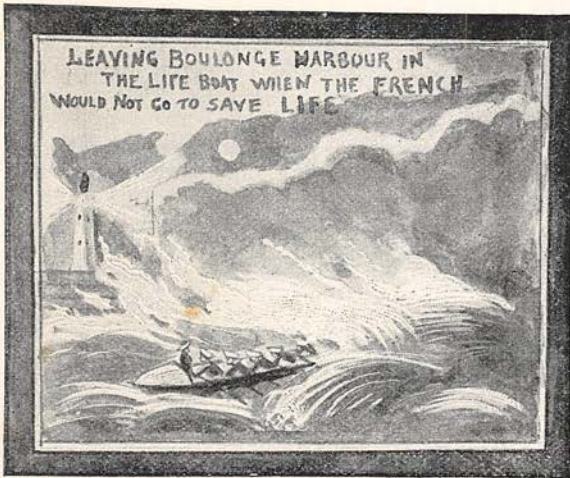
into six compartments; the first of the series represents Boulogne Harbour in a terrific storm, in which the French lifeboats were unwilling to venture out. Help, of course, came from the Jack Tar; and he, according to his own account, received injuries of a nature that necessitated his going under chloroform for having his tongue cut out. In this scene the operation is being performed by three or four white-haired, round-faced doctors, whilst a ring of medical students stand round in open-mouthed wonder.

This man piled up the agony by exhibiting with the picture a glass bottle containing an animal substance which he designated as the missing organ. Investigation proved that the tongue was a sheep's, and a magisterial censor of pictorial art sent the melo-

dramatist into prison. Of this picture there are about eight copies.

Strait-waistcoats are usually associated with a lunatic asylum; but the Society has brought them into connection with other places of incarceration and correction. There are three sets of crudely-painted oils on canvas, representing a direful calamity which necessitates the man wearing a kind of strait-waistcoat. The patient is depicted lying on a hospital bed, surrounded by doctors. The explanation, in which the spelling and the punctuation surpass the art of the picture, states:—

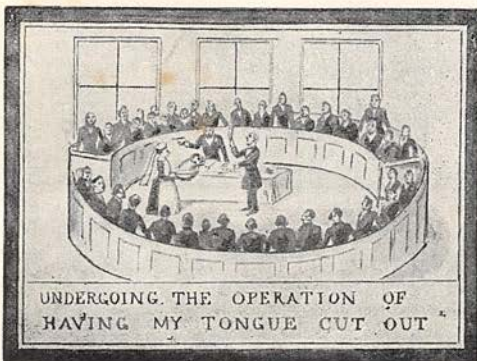
KIND FRIENDS. I HAVE MET WITH A ACCIDENT THAT HAS SO SEVERELY INJURED SPINE OF MY BACK THAT I AM UNABLE TO KEEP MY BACK STRAIGHT WITHOUT THE HELP OF A APPARATTUS.



THE PATRIOTIC TRICK.

represented by half-a-dozen replicas, which were found, of course, on different persons.

Loss of the human tongue appears to be

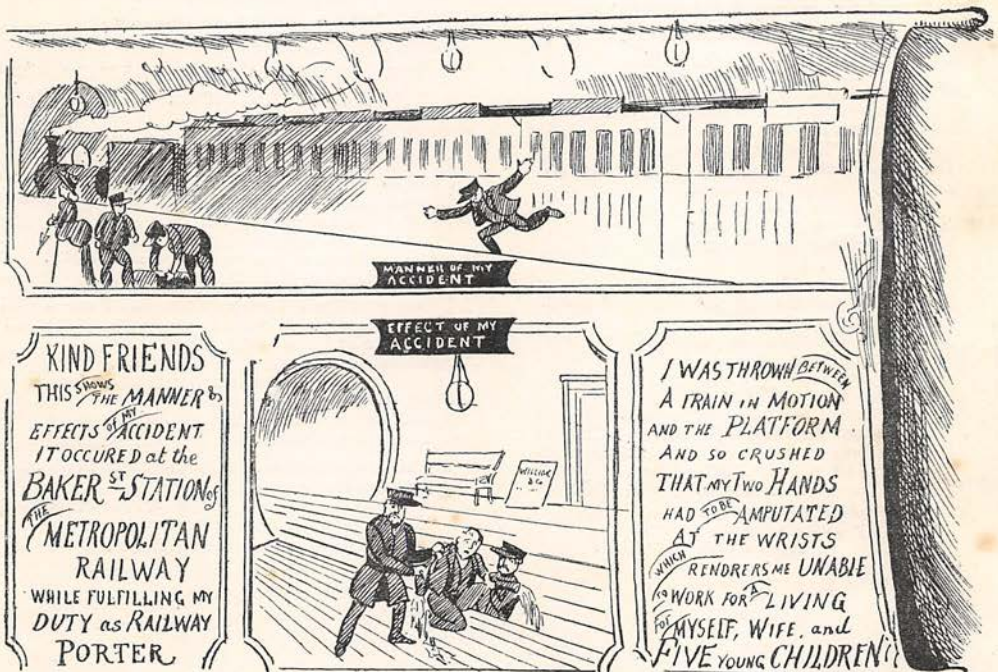


Close behind this artistic production stands the highly elaborate sketch reproduced beneath. It pictures a train rapidly moving through Baker Street Station whilst a porter (the beggar of course) is falling 'twixt the train and the platform. The next scene shows the mangled body with a lavish use of scarlet paint for the streaming blood, and the sympathy of the charitable is evoked for a man who would certainly have been pensioned by the company had he ever been in their service.

The huge canvas sketched on the next page purports to be quite a pictorial biography of a Manchester factory hand in twelve scenes.

process of being cut by machinery; the third sees him on his way to the hospital to the vividly manifested grief of many bystanders; in the next he is lying on a table and in the hands of the surgeons, whilst hundreds of students, dressed like workhouse boys, stand round in a circle. The doctor holds a great knife, and seems cutting the man into steaks. Most touching and heart-rending appears the whole scene. But the sentiment turns the other way when you learn that the "victim" was an able-bodied man, who probably bought it in a lodging-house for a few shillings.

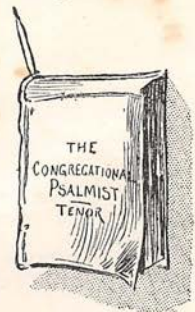
Pictorial falsehoods, however, do not ex-



The first scene reveals the customary happiness of the domestic hearth. From this high moral level, however, the taste of the artist descended rapidly, for in the remaining scenes he plunges into all the horrors of boiler explosions, hospitals, operations, and lameness. Only two copies of this adorn the walls of the gallery in Red Lion Square.

Similar in design is the picture which hangs next to these. Six apartments show a feature of the accident to which the beggar who was arrested with it alleged he had been a victim. In the morning you see him going to work, his children clinging to him and his wife hanging about his neck. In the next compartment he is undergoing the

haust the beggars' stock-in-trade. Opposite is sketched a "Congregational Hymn Book," found in the possession of one street rogue. It is possible the reader may have seen him stand outside a church porch, obviously too ashamed of his ragged appearance to go inside. The kind-hearted worshipper notices the poor man, and probably drops a coin into the hat held out to him. If he opened the hymn-book he would find between the cases simply a worn-out



directory with the marked addresses of those who habitually give to beggars.

For genuine amusement nothing beats the "poetry" turned out of the "Dispensary," as the lodging-house where such documents are composed is called. When the professional beggar ventures on the thin ice of literary composition his reputation suffers, for coherency, not to speak of prosody, is thrown to the winds.

There are numerous copies, painted in white letters on chocolate coloured card-boards, of the following effusion. It is headed—

THE QUARRELS OF A MASTER

AND HIS APPRENTICE ABRAHAM.

THE PRODIGAL SON

Being the Life of Myself.

When I was sixteen years of age,
The Thoughts now often wrack my brain,
When I started from Old England
To Fight for The Queen of Spain.
Young and foolish I thought of martial glory.
And Nobly He (*sic*) advanced
Mounted On a noble steed.
And took in my hand a lover,
To Wander from my Native shore
In A Foreign Land Afar.

I have been shot through the neck fifty years.
Sad is now my lot.
At the age of three score years and ten
No pension have I got.

After two years of War
At the Docks I met my dear mother.
Tears down her cheeks did run.
I said, Who are you in black for, Mother
She says, For you My Prodigal Son.
Wounded on the 16th March, 1836.
At Abnant in Spain,
By Trade a Poetry-maker.
Aged 74, January 1889.

Less heroic in tone, perhaps, but equally interesting is the following :—

Three and thirty years I worked at my trade.
By the blessing of God here I am.
On the day I saw my wife lay dead,
Going to the Infirmary I fell off a tram.

My father nor mother never saw railways or steam,
But the glimmer of oil-lamps,
Stage coaches and old waggon team;
But if they were on earth, instead of above,
They would think many parts was altered
And the world turned upside down.

Lastly comes the poet of sweet rusticity, although he penned the poem in a London lodging-house :—

"KENSINGTON GARDENS."

One day I was walking in Kensington Gardens
When I felt sad and forlorn
I said, "In that cottage, on that hill,
My dear old father was born.

When the vagrant's poet gets reminiscent he writes very mixed verses. The following is an example :—

"THE THINGS OF THE PAST."

I am no writer of novels or fiction, but the Truth
Encourage the cordwaining Bard
And to amuse you he will try,
And tell you a little of times gone by.
He's afflicted as you see with the double-T.
And this is all from the brains of 73.

I have seen the old oil-painting, and I see it still,
When the cowsheds stood at the bottom of the hill.
My father and His sister Alice
Milk and cows supplied to the Palace.
In that picture I have seen one-armed Jack
Fixed to an old oak stump—
I don't know whether they used him—
I mean the old pump.

My father has heard the bugle sound from the barracks
And the Huntsman's horn.
Near the Palace were our garden and Severn Barracks
Where Queen Victoria was born.

My own writer and publisher.