

LITERATURE, &c.

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PROFESSOR BUNGLE'S VICTIM.

BY PERCIVAL LEIGH.

'I AM certain I could if you'd only let me try. 'Tis the easiest thing in the world.'

'Ah, I dare say. No no, Bungle. I'll tell you what, though. If anything should happen to me, I have no objection to your doing it then. But first make yourself quite sure that the breath is well out of my body.'

'My dear Lambton, I do assure you that there is not the least danger.'

'No! Why how am I to breathe for goodness sake?'

'Why look. Put your hand before your mouth. Press tight. There—now inhale. Can't you?'

'Um!'

'Very well. That is all the difficulty you will have in breathing.'

'Eh? But how do you prevent the—what d'ye call it—from obstructing the nostrils?'

'Oh, that requires nothing but a little manual dexterity.'

'So Bungle, it seems that there would be just your manual dexterity between me and eternity?'

'No no. If anything went wrong we should clear off instantly; so that the worst that could happen would be a simple failure.'

'Well, but, now, do you mean to say that no fatal accident has ever resulted from it?'

'Never. In one case—the negro in the college of surgeons—a little inconvenience occurred, but that was when the whole body was taken at once, which impeded the muscles of respiration.'

'Really, it strikes me that this is an operation only to be performed on the dead subject.'

'Now, the operation to which Mr Lambton thus objected was that of having a cast taken of his head—Mr, or, as he had been dubbed by his acquaintance, Professor Bungle, was a student of Phrenology, and conceiving the head of his friend Lambton a great feat in illustration of the system of Gall, was desirous of a fac-simile of it to put in his collection by the side of Burke and Convoisier. Mr Lambton was in some measure aware of the nature of the process, and so by no means relished the notion of having his head and face impacted in a mass of plaster of Paris.'

'No,' he added, expressing a very natural apprehension. 'If I do, I do, but if I do I'm smothered.'

'Ah,' cried professor Bungle, 'that's your cautiousness. It really is very large. You ought to have your cast taken for the sake of science.'

'Science may have its army of martyrs, but I'm not going to enlist in that service,' said Mr Lambton.

'Mirthfulness!' exclaimed the professor. 'I wish you would keep a little book, and put down all the jokes you make in the course of the day. 'Mirthfulness large—made so many jokes in a year.' It would be most valuable evidence.'

'Oh, but,' remonstrated Mr Lambton, 'what a deal of trouble.'

'Ah!' the Professor observed, 'there you go with your small Order. Really a very singular correspondence of character with development. Don't you see how important it is to collect these facts?'

'No' answered Lambton. 'I must candidly say, I have no scientific enthusiasm.'

'Just so,' said Bungle. 'Ideality, and the Feelings generally, preponderating over Comparison and Casualty. Very remarkable.'

'Besides,' asked Mr Lambton, 'what would be the use of the plaster image?'

'To yourself—the greatest. It will enable you to study your own character, and ascertain from time to time what organs increase or diminish.'

'How so?'

'By comparing your head with the cast. If the head becomes larger in any direction, it will show that the corresponding faculty has improved, and vice versa. Suppose you gain the 8th of an inch of Conscientiousness, for instance. Take the difference between you and Greenacre, in this respect, at present as half an inch.'

'Do you mean to say I have only half an inch more honesty than Greenacre?'

'No, no. As half an inch is to your superiority over him, so will one eighth be your improvement upon yourself. Let us reckon by weight. Twenty grains of Conscientiousness are equal—'

'To many scruples of conscience! Oh come, I say, I can't believe all that.'

'Then test it. The proof of the pudding—'

'Is not, I hope, in taking a cast of my head,' said Mr Lambton.

'But don't you think,' suggested the crafty professor, changing his tack, 'that a faithful likeness of you would be an agreeable present to Mrs Lambton?'

'Eh,' responded the husband, 'touched in a tender point.'

'For your wedding day, you know,' urged the astute Bungle.

'Lay my head at her feet?' said Lambton. 'Come there's more sense in that. But are you sure now, it's quite safe?'

'Quite. I have undergone it myself; and had my head shaved on purpose,' replied the Professor.

'Head shaved! Nonsense!' exclaimed Mr Lambton. 'That I never will consent to.'

'The hair,' observed the Professor, 'is not essential to the animal economy.'

'Yes,' returned Lambton, 'but it is very essential to personal appearance. Can't you take the head with the hair on?'

'Why yes, I can,' answered Bungle, 'but to have it shaved would be much more satisfactory.'

'By no means,' said his friend, 'either to myself or Mrs Lambton.'

'Ah!' sighed the Professor, 'that is your love of Approbation. Never mind; it can be managed.'

'But surely the process must be very disagreeable.'

'Not at all. It is all over in five minutes.'

'Certain of that?'

'Positive.'

'Eh!—well!—well then I give in. But somehow, I'm very much afraid you'll make a mess of it.'

'Trust me for that. Look at my Constructiveness. Everything will be quite right, depend upon it.'

'When will you do it?'

'The sooner the better. Suppose we say to-morrow, here, in your study. Just get the carpet taken up; have in a bucket of water, a jug or two, a couple of wash-hand basins, a large dish, and a pillow or a bolster. The other things that will be wanted I'll bring with me.'

'Shall you require any assistance?'

'I will get my friend Hitch to come and help me;—clever fellow—should like you to know him.'

'Very well,' said Lambton. 'By the way don't tell my wife what we are going to do. I want to surprise her.'

'Secretiveness, eh? Useful faculty under proper control,' remarked Professor Bungle to-morrow, then—that will suit you.'

'To-morrow. And now suppose we go and have a bit of supper.'

'Alimentiveness!' said the Professor. 'Very good in moderation. Come along then.' They adjourned accordingly, Bungle much congratulating himself on the address with which he had inveigled Mr Lambton. 'Persuaded him it would please his wife. Appealed to his adhesiveness. Knew where to have him,' said Professor Bungle to himself, chuckling inwardly at the success of his psychological manoeuvre.

The next morning, Mr Bungle came, punctual to his appointment, and accompanied by his friend Hitch. Mr Hitch was a young philosopher, member of mechanics' Institute, at which the Professor sometimes lectured. He was studying for the profession of a civil engineer, and hence, as also from his cranial configuration, Mr Bungle inferred a mechanical turn, likely to render him an eligible *famulus* in any delicate operation. The room had been prepared according to Professor Bungle's directions, and Mr Lambton was ready for the institution of immediate proceedings.

'Now then, Hitch,' said Bungle, 'let us arrange our implements and materials.' Lay them out upon the table. First the plaster of Paris.'

Mr Hitch plunged his hand into a blue bag which he carried, and drew out a large earthen jar.

'Fresh burnt!' observed the Professor. 'Got it this morning from Signor Fiaseo's. Go on.'

Mr Hitch dived again and produced a ball of twine and trowel.

'You are not going to stucco me like a wall with that instrument?' cried Mr Lambton.

'Don't be fidgetty,' answered Bungle. 'Our success will depend on being all of us quite cool. We shall get on capitally, only don't put me out.—Is that all, Hitch? Where's the spermaceti ointment?'

'Ointment!' exclaimed Lambton. 'What for?'

'To smoothe down the hair and whiskers, which would be much better off,—but no matter.'

'Thank you,' said Mr Lambton, 'if it is all the same, I should very much prefer pomatum.'

Mr Bungle asked what occasion there was to be so nice; but Mr Lambton decidedly objected to the ointment; and a maid servant was despatched for six-pennyworth of pomatum to the hairdresser's, Bungle and Hitch employing themselves, in the meanwhile, in adjusting the jugs, basins, dish, pillow, bolster, string, trowel, and plaster of Paris. In five minutes the girl returned. 'Now,' said Mr Bungle, 'I think we are ready.'

Mr Lambton, by the Professor's directions, took off his coat, turned down his collar, and seated himself in a chair. Bungle then proceeded to agglutinate his hair and whiskers with pomatum, so as to convert him into a dense concrete, overlying smoothly the head and cheek. He then caused his patient to lie on the ground, and placed under his head the large dish supported by the pillow. This done, in order to measure the distance, he made him sit upright on the floor, and adapted to his head two pieces of string, one transversely crossing the crown and ears, and the other passing over the middle, along the line of the nose to the chin. To keep them in their places, he desired Mr Hitch to tie their ends around the neck with another cord, which Hitch drew so tightly that Mr Lambton cried out that he was strangling him.

'What are you about Hitch? Take care pray,' said Bungle.

'What is this for?' inquired Lambton. 'One would think you were measuring me for a gentleman's Real Head of Hairs, or Invisible Peruke.'

'By pulling out these strings,' answered the professor, 'while the plaster is moist, we divide it into separate portions, by which mean we take it off.'

'Doesn't it sometimes stick?'

'Never, unless the operator is very inexperienced indeed, or excessively clumsy. Let me see. We've arranged all the preliminaries, I think. Yes. Now, Hitch, fill the hand-basin half full of water. Will you?' The assistant did as he was requested. 'Now, then, if you please,' continued Bungle, 'take that spoon, and keep stirring it while I sprinkle in the plaster of Paris. Gently,' cried the Professor, Hitch went to work as if he were whipping cream, bespattering himself, the table, and Mr Bungle with whitewash.

The liquid, having acquired the requisite consistency, Mr Hitch, by the direction of his superior, set the basin on the floor close to the dish, into which the professor transferred a large portion of its contents. He then took his patient by the shoulders, and assisted him to recline, so that the back of his head might sink gently into the mass of plaster. 'So far so good,' exclaimed Bungle; and proceeded by the help of the trowel, to build up the material around the head of Lambton as far as his temples. 'And now,' he said, 'for the face.'

'I don't think we have mixed enough plaster,' observed Hitch.

'Dear me, no—that is a pity! We must make some more, only be quick,' cried professor Bungle. 'Stand out of the way!' Mr Hitch in complying with this request, upset the bucket. 'Do—do be more cautious! There ring the bell; ask for some more water. Confound it, the plaster will set! Stop, let me pull out the strings. There,—we can do the front half by itself; harm no after all,' said the professor, readjusting the piece of twine that corresponded to the profile.

In the meantime Mr Hitch had despatched the servant to replenish the bucket, which having been done our artists commenced operations. Just as they had begun mixing the second batch of plaster, somebody tapped at the door, to which Mr Bungle rushed with an exclamation of impatience. It was the maid servant. 'Please sir,' said the girl, 'misses wants to know what you are doing of.'

'Nothing that she need be alarmed at. Go away, there's a good girl; and please do not interrupt us,' and Bungle earnestly and hastily closed the door.

'I say,' expostulated the prostrate Lambton, 'is this your five minutes?'

'Pray don't talk,' returned the Professor. 'Don't there's a good fellow.' Mr Lambton was silent.

'Now' said Bungle, having prepared the second layer of plaster, 'Lambton attend to me. We are going to do the face; be sure on no account to stir.'

'Very well.'

'Try as much as you can to keep your features motionless, or else the cast will be disfigured.'

'I understand.'

'Lastly, if it should—of course it won't—but if it should happen that you feel any inconvenience in breathing—Hitch, reach me that walking stick—just knock with this cane three distinct times on the floor. Do you understand?'

'Perfectly.'

'Good,' said the Professor. 'Now for the most delicate part of the process. Shut your eyes and mouth and hold them steadily closed.'

Bungle gently poured a spoonful of plaster into each orbit, and then very gingerly carried his work over the whole face, leaving out only the under part of the nose. This portion of the job was accomplished without any accident, except that Mr Hitch once allowed the basin to overflow on Lambton's breast.

So much having been prosperously effected, professor Bungle applied another coating of composition and a third, and a fourth over the mask to give it the requisite thickness. At length he said he thought that would do.

'Does strike you,' hinted Mr Hitch, 'that there is quite sufficient plaster over the nose?'

'Eh!—why, perhaps not. Best to make sure' replied Bungle, refilling the spoon. Here there was another knock at the door. The professor starting, dropped the daub of plaster, and thus completely stopped up the aperture which had been left for the patient's respiration. Mr Lambton immediately rapped the ground with his walking-stick. The knock at the door was renewed at the same time, and diverted the attention of the operator from the signal.

Rap-tap-tap! went the stick of Mr Lambton. Bang, bang, bang, resounded the knuckles at the door.

'Dear, dear,' exclaimed the distracted professor, 'what a bore.'

'Let me come in,' cried the voice from without.'

'Stay!—for heaven's sake, stay a moment,' shouted the professor wildly.

'I won't! I shan't—I will, I must know what you are doing with William,' shrieked the voice in feminine accents.

Hitch turn the key! cried Bungle. The latter rushed to the door, which before he could accomplish his purpose, was thrown open, knocking him backwards, and with him the table, and the whole apparatus on it, and Mrs Lambton sprang impetuously into the room. At the same time Mr Lambton started up in the agonies of suffocation, clawing off with his fingers the plaster which obstructed his nostrils. But top-heavy with the weight upon his head, he reeled over, and would have fallen, unless the professor had caught him. Mrs Lambton uttered a wild scream, and was tumbling when Mr Hitch jumped up, and received her in his arms.

You have killed him. You have have destroyed my husband, gasped the lady.

The deuce take it! the deuce take it! cried professor Bungle stamping with vexation.

Mr Lambton certainly presented an appearance calculated to alarm the wife of his bosom. The hinder part of the cast had fallen off, but the whole front of head and face were encased in what appeared to be a large ragged block of chalk. His clothes were bespattered with the droppings of the process, and, unable to speak with heaving chest, he hung over the shoulder of Mr Bungle.

My good lady, there's no mischief done—there's not indeed,—except that you have spoiled our work. You see he breathes perfectly well, the professor said.

He breathes! Thank goodness! ejaculated the wife, sinking into a chair which did not happen to be overturned.

Come, Lambton, lie down. The patient flung his arms about frantically. Nonsense! we are going to take it off. There is not a moment to lose, for in one more it will be as hard as brick, roared Bungle. An indistinct groan escaped from Lambton's nose, and he again resigned himself to the hands of the operator.

The professor hastily pulled out the remaining string, which divided the mask into two lateral portions. Ha! said he, we shall have a tolerable face yet;—nose a little injured—but that won't much signify. Hitch, the trowel! and with this instrument Mr Bungle proceeded to complete the detachment of the two sides. They yielded sufficiently to allow Mr Lambton to open his mouth, a liberty which he made use of to utter an expression too forcible to be repeated.

Don't give way to your destructiveness: we shall do better than I thought, yet, observed Bungle.

Take it off!—why don't you take it off? spat-tered Mr Lambton.

It hangs a little, replied the professor. The scissors, Hitch,—or your penknife,—that will do.

What are you at, yelled the patient.

Only cutting through a little lock of hair which it has adhered by. But it stuck by several, which had to be divided, one by one, to the unspeakable anguish of Mr Lambton, over whom his wife all this while hung, wringing her hands in deprecation.

Wont it come off now, inquired Mr Hitch.

It is still entangled, returned Bungle, by the whiskers.

Can't you use the scissors? moaned unhappy Lambton.

They won't reach far enough,' answered professor Bungle. Accordingly he was obliged literally to saw through each particular hair of either whisker, twitching at every effort a filament of the facial nerve, and eliciting a cry of agony from the sufferer. In about three quarters of an hour the mask was disengaged, and the poor fellow released from his torture. Thank heaven its over, he cried, starting to his feet.

My dear William how could you? ejaculated Mrs Lambton.

Really, Lambton, stammered Bungle, I am very sorry.

Not a word, said Lambton. It is no use now. I'm alive; that's enough. Mary Ann dear, some hot water.

It was all accidental, pleaded the professor. I've no patience with you Mr Bungle, said Mrs Lambton.

Amid confused ejaculations devout and indignant, Mr Lambton applied himself to divest his head and face of the fragments of stone-mason's rubbish which adhered to them; and while he was thus occupied, Mr Bungle and Mr Hitch picked up the broken bits of the mould. I think we shall be able to put them together. We shall have something to show after all, exclaimed Bungle.

I should hope you would, after what I have undergone, observed Lambton. Well, if ever I am such a fool again. But never mind, it serves me quite right. A pretty figure I am I dare say.

You are indeed, William, said his wife, only look in the glass.

How ever shall I get the grease out of my hair, demanded Lambton.

Oh! answered the professor, easily, with a little soft soap and soda.

In spite, however, of soft soda and soda, and continual ablation, the hair of Mr Lambton, for at least a fortnight, presented the appearance, and partook largely of the substance of a pound of candles. Moreover, both it and his whiskers were notched in divers places to the skin, and as he was forced to be cropped close for the sake of uniformity, it was many months before he could present himself in company without giving rise to certain remarks in connection with the subject of prison discipline.

Professor Bungle and Mr Hitch joined the fragment of the mould, and were ultimately enabled to produce a sort of cast from it. But the front and back portions having slipped at the juncture, the hinder part of the head was about an inch higher than the fore; there were also various bumps upon it, not phrenological, corresponding to gaps in the shell; and, by reason of the aperture which had been left at the end of the nose, the extremity of that feature was garnished with an excrescence resembling a large plum. Moreover as the patient had not been able to command his countenance, the face was contorted by a hideous grin, expressive of pain and exasperation. Mrs Lambton declared she would not keep such a thing; Lambton begged that he might never see it again; and the professor was ashamed of his own handywork; so, it was finally consigned to Mr Hitch, who still preserves at his lodgings, on the mantle-piece, the fearful memorial of professor's Bungle's awkwardness.