

Pierce Egan and Charles Dickens: From *Tom and Jerry* to *Sketches by Boz*

Introducing his 1869 edition of a by-then almost forgotten book, the publisher, John Camden Hotten, reminisced:

Eight-and-forty years ago the most popular work in British literature bore this title: --

LIFE IN LONDON; or the DAY AND NIGHT SCENES OF JERRY HAWTHORN, ESQ., and his elegant friend CORINTHIAN TOM, accompanied by BOB LOGIC, the Oxonian, in their Rambles and Sprees through the Metropolis. By PIERCE EGAN (author of "Walks through Bath", "Sporting Anecdotes", "Picture of the Fancy", "Boxiana", etc.), dedicated to His Most Gracious Majesty King George the Fourth. Embellished with 36 Scenes from Real Life, designed and etched by I.R. & G. Cruikshank; and enriched with numerous original Designs on Wood, by the same Artists. 1821.

"This was the book – the literature – of that period," Hotten continued, "the one work which many elderly gentlemen still remember far away in the distance of their youth. A tedious – and by some will be considered an absurd – composition,... it has just this claim to our attention, that it is, perhaps, the best picture of 'Society' ... in the days when George IV was king, that has been bequeathed to us."

Hotten went on to quote from Thackeray's Roundabout Paper, *De Juventute*:

What is this I see? A boy, -- a boy in a jacket. He is at a desk; he has great books before him, Latin and Greek books and dictionaries. Yes; but behind the great books, which he pretends to read, is a little one with pictures, which he is really reading. It is – yes, I can read it now – it is ... *Life in London, or the Adventures of Corinthian Tom, Jeremiah Hawthorn, and their friend, Bob Logic*, by Pierce Egan and it has pictures – oh! Such funny pictures! As he reads, there comes behind the boy a man, a dervish, in a black gown, like a woman, and a square black cap, and he has a book in each hand; and he seizes the boy who is reading the picture book, and lays his head upon one of the books, and smacks it with the other.

Much earlier, in 1840, Thackeray had written, in an article about George Cruikshank for the *Westminster Review*:

Tom and Jerry must have a word here; for although by no means Mr. Cruikshank's best work, his reputation was extraordinarily raised by it. Tom and Jerry were as popular twenty years since as Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller now are; ... to show the mutability of human affairs, and the evanescent nature of reputation, we have been to the British Museum and no less than

five circulating libraries, in quest of the book, and “Life in London”, alas! is not to be found at any one of them. We can only, therefore, speak of the work from recollection, but have still a clear remembrance of the leather gaiters of Jerry Hawthorn, the green spectacles of Logic, and the hooked nose of Corinthian Tom. They were the school-boy’s delight;...

Continuing, Thackeray remarked:

As to the literary contents of the book, they have passed sheer away But it must have had some merit of its own, that is clear; it must have given striking descriptions of life in some part or other of London, for all London read it, and went to see it in its dramatic shape.

Twenty years later Thackeray paid another visit to the National Library, and this time was able to find *Life in London*. Writing in October of 1860, he said:

... on reperusal, *Tom and Jerry* is not so brilliant as I had supposed it to be. The pictures are just as fine as ever; and I shook hands with broad-backed Jerry and Corinthian Tom with delight, after many years’ absence. But the style of writing, I own, was not pleasing to me; I even thought it a little vulgar – well! well! other writers have been considered vulgar – as a description of the sports and amusements of London in the ancient times, more curious than amusing.

But the pictures! – oh ! the pictures are noble still! First, there is Jerry arriving from the country, in a green suit and leather gaiters, and being measured for a fashionable suit at Corinthian House, by Corinthian Tom’s tailor. Then away for the career of pleasure and fashion! The park! ... the theatre! the saloon!! the green-room!!! Rapturous bliss – the opera itself! and then, perhaps, to Temple Bar to knock down a Charley there! ... and now they are at Newgate, seeing the irons knocked off the malefactor’s legs previous to the execution. What hardened ferocity in the countenance of the desperado in yellow breeches! What compunction in the face of the gentleman in black (who, I suppose, has been forging), and who clasps his hands and listens to the chaplain! Now we haste away to merrier scenes; ... we are at a private party, at which Corinthian Tom is waltzing ... with Corinthian Kate, whilst Bob Logic, the Oxonian is playing on the piano... “The plate conveys a correct representation of the ‘gay scene’ at that precise moment. The anxiety of the Oxonian to witness the attitude of the elegant pair had nearly put a stop to their movements. On turning round from the pianoforte and presenting his comical mug, Kate could scarce suppress a laugh...”

Hotten, commenting on Egan’s book, laments:

Now every London man is weary and blasé. There is an enjoyment of life in these young bucks of 1823 which contrasts strangely with our feelings of 1869. Here, for instance, is a specimen of their talk and walk. “If,” says LOGIC, -- “if enjoyment is your motto, you may make the most of an evening at Vauxhall, ... It is all free-and-easy. Stay as long as you like, and depart when you think proper.” – “Your description is so flattering,” replied JERRY,

“that I do not care how soon the time arrives for us to start.” LOGIC then proposed “a bit of a stroll,” in order to get rid of an hour or two, ... A turn or two in Bond Street, a stroll through Piccadilly, a look in at Tattersall’s, a ramble through Pall Mall, and a strut on the Corinthian Path, fully occupied the time of our heroes until the hour for dinner arrived, when a few glasses of TOM’S rich wines soon put them on the qui vive. *VAUXHALL* was then the object in view, and the TRIO started, bent upon enjoying the pleasures which this place so amply affords.”

“Mark the varieties of lounge in which the young men indulge – now a stroll, then a look in, then a ramble, and presently a strut. When George, Prince of Wales, was twenty, I have read in an old magazine, ‘the Prince’s lounge’ was a peculiar manner of walking which the young bucks imitated,” Hotten continues. “What was the Corinthian path here recorded?... And what were the rich wines which could occasion such as delightful perversion of the intellect as to enable it to enjoy simple pleasures there?...”

So the game of life proceeds, until Jerry Hawthorn, the rustic, is fairly knocked up by all this excitement, and is forced to go home, and the last picture represents him getting into the coach at the “White Horse Cellar”... whilst his friends shake him by the hand; ...and whilst the Jews hang round with oranges, knives, and sealing-wax; ...Where are they now, those sealing-wax vendors? where are the guards? where are the jolly teams? where are the coaches? and where the youth that climbed inside and out of them; that heard the merry horn that sounds no more,...

The age was the age of excesses – of vulgar refinement and unreal politeness.... These were the last days of coarse caricatures, of dueling, and of the glorious three-bottle system after dinner. There is no deception about the present book;...and therefore its value as a true picture of life fifty years ago. ¹

Hotten’s comments, as well as Thackeray’s, reflect the mingled nostalgia and disapproval with which the Victorians regarded the literature and *mores* of the Regency, a period whose spirit really extended well into the 1820’s, when the Prince Regent was already George IV. Dickens’s own view of those times was less nostalgic and considerably more critical. He was, of course, familiar with the literature of the era; and there is no doubt that he had read Egan’s work, for a copy of *Life in London* was on his shelves when he died. “How indeed could he help but be aware of the books that had taken London by storm when he was a youth?”²

But who was Pierce Egan? Born in 1772, or according to recent scholarship, in 1774, he died in 1849, his long life spanning the reigns of George III, George IV, William IV, and the first twelve years of Queen Victoria’s. Of Irish Protestant extraction, he was probably brought to England by his parents while he was a small child. Although his grandfather had been a graduate of Trinity College in Dublin and a clergyman, his father was able to find work in London only as a humble paviour, a layer of pavements. At sixteen Pierce was apprenticed to a printer in Bloomsbury; he later worked as a compositor for the publishing firm of Smeeton’s. He was largely self-educated. He

admired the eighteenth-century novelists: Defoe, Smollett, Fielding and Sterne. He adored Shakespeare and idolized Sheridan, both as a playwright and a parliamentarian. Like Dickens, he loved the theatre and was an enthusiastic amateur actor.³ He was also a clever rhymester, composing many verses, some of which were set to music, and sung at social gatherings; for, like Dickens, he was convivial.

Unlike Dickens, who had little interest in sports, Egan was fascinated by the world of boxing, its champions and its patrons, called “The Fancy.” His book, *Boxiana; or, Sketches of Ancient and Modern Pugilism*, published in 1812, made him famous. On the strength of it, he got his first job as a newspaper reporter for Bell’s *Weekly Dispatch*, for which he wrote articles on prize-fighting until 1824. He was a “journalist of genius... the unquestioned father of the great tradition of sporting journalism... His information appeared authentic and it was accepted as authoritative.”⁴

But the book that was to become the talk of the town, *Life in London*, began to appear monthly, on July 15, 1821. Again, quoting Hotten, in 1869:

This sample... of the entire work was quite enough for society to judge by. It took both town and country by storm. It was found to be the exact thing in literature that the readers of those days wanted. Edition after edition was called for – and supplied as fast as the illustrations could be got away from a small army of women and children who were colouring them. With the appearance of Numbers II and III, the demand only increased, and a revolution in our literature, in our drama, and even in our nomenclature, began to develop itself. All the announcements from Paternoster Row were of books, great and small, depicting life in London; dramatists at once turned their attention to the same subject, and tailors, boot-makers, and hatters recommended nothing but Corinthian shapes and Tom and Jerry patterns.

A translation, entitled *The English Diorama, or, Picturesque Rambles in London*, was immediately published in Paris; A French critic called Egan “the Mercier of England”, saying that he conducted his readers “from the royal palace to the most miserable pot-houses, the resort of beggars and the dregs of the people.”

Several dramatizations soon appeared. By far the most successful of these was William T. Moncrieff’s *Tom and Jerry, or Life in London; an Operatic Extravaganza in Three Acts*, which opened at the Adelphi Theatre on November 26, 1821, creating

...a furor among play-goers, the like of which had never occurred before, and has never occurred since. It ran for upwards of three hundred nights, and only gave over because the actors were tired out; the audience was as mad for it as ever. It made the fortune of the house, and everybody connected with it – except the author.

By “author” Hotten meant the dramatist, Moncrieff, who himself later described the effect of the play upon London audiences:

From the popularity of the subject, the novelty and acknowledged truth of the various scenes comprised in it; the inimitable manner in which it as first acted, and the beauty of the music I fortunately selected, this piece... excited a sensation totally unprecedented in theatrical history: from the highest to the lowest, all classes were alike anxious to witness its representation.... Seats were sold for weeks before they could be occupied; every theatre in the United Kingdom, and even in the United States, enriched its coffers by performing it; It established the fortunes of most of the actors engaged in its representation, and gave birth to several newspapers.... Persons have been known to travel post from the farthest parts of the kingdom to see it; and five guineas have been offered in an evening for a single seat. Its language became the language of the day; drawing-rooms were turned into chaffing-cribs, and rank and beauty learned to patter slang.

Even during the decade that followed the Regency itself, there were some objections to the tone and content of *Life in London*, especially in its dramatic versions. Moncrieff took these up:

With respect to the cry of immorality, ... it is soon answered. To say nothing of the envy of rival theatres, ... those notorious pests, the watchmen, dexterously joined in the war-howl of a detraction raised against it, and by converting every street-broil into a “Tom and Jerry row”, endeavored to revenge themselves for the *exposé* its scenes afford of their villainy and extortion – but all in vain. In vain, too,... the Methodists took the alarm, – in vain they distributed the whole of the stock of the Religious Tract Society at the doors of the theatre, ... they but increased the number of its followers, and added to its popularity. Vainly, too, was the Lord Chamberlain called upon to suppress it. His Grace came one night to see it, and brought his Duchess the next.... To those venerable noodles who complain that I and my prototype, Pierce Egan, have made this the age of flash, I answer, “Any age is better than *The Age of Cant*. ”

Besides Moncrieff, five other authors produced plays based on Egan’s work, so that in the summer of 1822, *Life in London* was being performed at no less than ten theatres in and around the capital. A juvenile version, by one Mr. Hodgson, appeared. Finally, Egan tried his own hand at a dramatization, lengthily entitled:

The Songs, Parodies, etc., introduced in the New Pedestrian Equestrian Extravaganza, in Three Acts of Gaiety, Frisk, Fun, and Patter, called *Tom and Jerry* or *Life in London*, with a highly-finished Picture of the Pony Races, by Mr. Geo. Cruikshank: 1822.

“This *Extravaganza* was performed at Astley’s, but, with the exception of a pony-race around the theatre, on a raised boarding,” writes Hotten, “it does not seem to have caught the public taste. It was to the Adelphi that the crowds flocked.”⁵

Life in London, in its original, non-dramatic form, has been aptly described as “neither quite a novel nor quite anything else.” It was a “hugely successful foray into the high and low life of the city,” Egan’s eye being less on narrative than on places. It owed its popularity to “its graphic accuracy... its racy slang, and to Egan’s appetite for the diversity of the city.”⁶ It gives a vivid picture of the “rough vitality of the Regency and the reign of George IV.” With the story are lengthy digressions in the form of footnotes in which the author “mixed scandalous gossip and libelous caricatures of actual people of the day. He held up the well-to-do flashy sporting-set to the mingled admiration, envy and emulation of the masses.”⁷

Still, Hotten’s criticism of the book as “tedious” is not unjustified. The first seven chapters – there are fifteen in all – get the reader off to a slow start. Chapter I, “An Invocation”, is highly “literary” and “poetic” in its appeal to the great authors of the eighteenth century, as well as to the Muse: “Come, then, thou shades of departed talent, enrich my judgment, guide my pen, and inspire me with confidence to commence my arduous undertaking.”

The second chapter, “A Camera Obscura View of the Metropolis”, contains Egan’s almost sociological observations:

The EXTREMES ... are daily to be met with From the most rigid, persevering, never-tiring industry, down to laziness,.... The next-door neighbor of a man in London is generally as great a stranger to him, as if he lived at the distance of York. And it is in the Metropolis that prostitution is so profitable a business, and conducted so openly, that hundreds of persons keep houses of ill-fame, for the reception of girls not more than twelve and thirteen years of age, without a blush upon their cheeks, Yet, there are some of the worthiest, most tender-hearted, liberal minds, and charitable dispositions, which ornament London, and render it the delight and happiness of society..... Indeed, the Metropolis is a complete Cyclopedia every square ... is a sort of map well worthy of exploring, There is not a street ... but what may be compared to a large or small volume of intelligence, abounding with anecdotes, incident, and peculiarities.”⁸

Chapter III is largely devoted to a description of the hero, Corinthian Tom, whose sobriquet means a wealthy man-about-town. Tom is the only son of an immensely rich father, who “was the architect of his own fortune,” and of a doting Mamma, whose ambition it was that her handsome son should become “the finished gentleman,” not restrained by “the dry plodding of business,” but mixing with “the upper ranks of society.” At age twenty-five, he finds himself an orphan, “in the possession of fine estates, plenty of money, and no one to control his inclinations.” He goes to London, intending to

...participate in the pleasures of the great world.... LIFE, in all its various shapes, he was determined to see. ... His manners were pleasing, and he scarcely ever failed in prepossessing himself strongly in the favour of his hearers.... Among the modest fair ones, CORINTHIAN TOM was an object

of more than a little attention;.... He was polite, generous, and good-humoured; always lively in their presence, and abounding in that sort of “small talk” and anecdote which banished ennui ... and communicated pleasure to the female bosom;.... With a certain class of the sex, better known by the higher order of “Cyprians”, the weight of Tom’s purse had gone before him; and in his visits to the Opera, the Theatres, and other places of public resort, lures were held out to ensnare, captivate, and secure him; ...Like all fashionable men, he professed to entertain the highest sense of honour, and little doubt ... he felt its vast importance in society, except, perhaps, ... where it is so much professed and so little acted upon by gentlemen, to the – seduced female! ⁹

Chapter IV contains long digressional foot-notes upon various living persons, including the poet, Savage, an illegitimate son, abandoned by both his noble parents. In Chapter V Tom meets the Oxonian, Robert Logic, Esq., who has “no ambition to shine through scholarship.” He had been “on the Town” for several years and “no person had been more industrious towards destroying a fine constitution, or endeavoring to reduce a long purse, than he had.” With his “high spirit”, lively ideas of “taste and style”, and his complete self-possession, he makes a strong impression on Tom, who proves an apt pupil, and, in a very short time, surpasses his master. ¹⁰

Chapter VI describes Tom’s search for a suitable mistress. He feels “a certain vacuum without the society of some superior female... a tender companion to occupy and interest his leisure moments.” (This, surely, is a tongue-in-cheek remark by Egan, the hard-working journalist!) Tom’s difficulty lies in finding a woman

... to correspond with his critical ideas of taste and elegance, so as not to reduce the reputation he had acquired in the *Beau Monde*, ... one who seemed to feel, or who pretended to feel, intuitively upon all subjects of taste and elegance.

He is entranced by the beauty and style of “the Paradise of the West”, and “like a true sportsman, his shots told, and the prize was borne off in triumph.... Tom was the admiration and envy of the *Ton*; and his *chère amie*, ... the lovely Miss Catherine, was soon distinguished by the denomination of CORINTHIAN KATE.”¹¹

In Chapter VII, his dissipation having told on his constitution, Tom decides to visit the home of his uncle, Squire Hawthorn, in Somerset. There he meets his cousin, Jerry Hawthorn, and they become fast friends.

JERRY was fond of a bit of fun – as gay as a lark – open-hearted, generous and unsuspecting.... At hunting and shooting he would not yield the palm to anyone.... In throwing a quoit he exhibited great strength and dexterity.... In cudgeling or wrestling, JERRY had none the worse of it.... In convivial scenes, no one made himself more jolly....

When Tom is about to return to London, he prevails upon his uncle to allow Jerry to accompany him; after an uneventful trip, both arrive at Corinthian House to begin their “rambles and sprees” in the capital.¹²

All this has been introductory, for it is only with Chapter VIII that *Life in London* really begins. First, Jerry is outfitted in the latest fashion by Tom’s tailor, Mr. Primefit of Regent Street. Then the two young men make their appearance on horseback at Hyde Park, described by Tom as “the Show-Shop of the Metropolis”. Jerry is impressed by the “long line of splendid equipages, rattling along ... under the guidance of charioteers of the highest blood and pedigree.” He is also struck by “the parade of beauties”, and, as they are about to leave the park, by “a dashing equipage, in which were seated a plump, rosy, middle-aged female, richly attired, accompanied by three beautiful girls ... in the highest style of fashion.” The girls give him “such good-natured looks, almost winking at him”, that he is rooted to the spot. He takes them for a “Mamma and her three daughters.” But Logic, who has joined the pair, informs the naïve Jerry that

... those three nymphs, who have so much dazzled your optics, are three nuns, and the plump female is Mother --- of great notoriety, but generally designated the Abbess of ---; her visitors consist principally of the higher classes of society.¹³

By the ninth chapter Jerry’s rusticity is fast wearing off. Together with Tom and Logic, he visits the theatres. At Drury Lane they take a mere “glimpse” at the play, but soon “bustle” into the saloon, or lobby, of the playhouse. There they are surrounded by “numbers of the gay Cyprians,” who nightly visit this place in search of customers. These “Fancy Pieces” present their cards to Jerry, who is astonished that “such dashing females should keep shops.” Eventually, the management of the theatre puts out the lights as the “only effectual method of getting rid of such company.” As soon as the SPELL of these dubious ladies has been broken by their departure, Tom suggests taking a “turn to a ‘Sluicery’” (a gin-shop) to “have a bit of fun.”

This “Sluicery” does not resemble the elaborate gin-palaces described by Boz, but is more in keeping with the slum that surrounds it. The patrons include some of the “unfortunate heroines” whom the “breaking up of the SPELL has turned-up without any luck”, and Tom “sluices their ivories” with some “blue ruin” (gin) in order to “send them home to their pannies (lodgings) full of spirits.” Meanwhile, at the left of the bar, as shown by the illustration, Gateway Peg has “just entered for her ninth glass.... This ladybird... is taking her drops of jackey with OLD MOTHER BRIMSTONE, who has toddled in to have a flash of lightning before she goes to roost....” Mother Brimstone is seen “pouring some blue ruin down the baby’s throat to stop its crying” for she has borrowed the kid in order to help her begging.

Gateway Peg is a fine but afflicting portrait of the rapid degradations from virtue to vice. This lump of infamy, disease and wretchedness, was once a well-known toast among the bon vivants for her elegance of person.... The little urchin, who has been dragged out of bed by his mother, and who is seen

begging for a “quartern of the best gin, to cure his mammy’s pain in the stomach” has scarcely any covering on his back... The Cove and Covess (master and mistress) of the Sluicery... who are pocketing the blunt (money) as fast as they can count it, have just been complaining of the wickedness of the times.

When Tom and Jerry, rather drunk, leave the gin-shop to stroll into a coffee-shop, they find a Hogarthian picture of “Low Life in the Metropolis: drunkenness, beggary, lewdness and carelessness.” The customers stare at these Swells, the prostitutes ogle them, and as they leave, they are provoked into a brawl by some roughnecks. Tom and Jerry are coming out ahead, but someone summons the Watch. “Lots of Charleys came toddling up,” overpowering the two and taking them to the Watch-house. There, the “bleeding mug of the watchman, together with his broken lantern, were such strong evidence against them that the best they could do was to be discharged upon bail.”

Next day at the Magistrate’s, where they have been required to appear for “breaking the peace”, Tom and Jerry are charged by the watchman, Barney O’Bother, who is

dressed quite theatrically.... [His] head tied up with a handkerchief, in his right hand he held a broken lantern, a sort of stage property... and in his left a damaged rattle, also an old performer at Bow Street. A threadbare coat, torn in slits, likewise ready for any emergency, completed the dénouement. Barney told a prime “tough story” to the Magistrate, laying it on rare and thick against the CORINTHIAN, and also claiming that Jerry had “nearly knocked out one of his eyes.”

The Magistrate has no alternative but to order the two to make good the damage to the watchman, which they do, and are thus able to return home. While waiting their turn to be examined, however, Tom and Jerry have been witnesses to a pathetic scene. A young woman, abandoned by her lover and rejected by former friends, has been brought into the court by a cab-driver, whose fare she was not able to pay, after driving to several addresses to ask for help. On learning that she is destitute, both the cab-driver and the Magistrate take pity on her. The former forgoes his fare, and the latter gives her three shillings, urging her to return to her family and a virtuous life.¹⁴ The likelihood of seduced girls to fall into prostitution is a frequent theme of Egan, as it is of Dickens – notably in “The Pawnshop” and in the story of Little Em’ly.

Chapter X takes our heroes to the Masquerade Supper at the Opera House, where Jerry attempts an assignation with a masqued woman, but has to retire when her husband approaches. We later learn that her name is Lady Wanton. At the end of the evening, Tom, Jerry, and Logic separate. “Where they went or how they spent their time, is not worth the trouble of inquiring; let it suffice it to state that [none of them] found their way to Corinthian House on bidding adieu to the MASQUERADE.” This is not the only instance in which Pierce Egan broadly hints that the young men have repaired to a brothel.

Next morning they visit the Bond Street rooms of the former boxing champion of England, Mr. Jackson, who now gives lessons in the art of self-defense to gentlemen. Tom spars with him as his friends look on. Upon leaving, Tom asks Jerry and Bob to accompany him while he selects a diamond necklace for Kate, to make amends for not having taken her to the Masquerade – and, perhaps, for some other things as well! The three then go to see the current boxing champion, Mr. Thomas Cribb, where the plate shows them admiring his silver trophy cup. As they are about to leave, a Cockney “dog-fancier” asks them how they would like to see “a bit of fun with this here phenomomy Monkey tonight. He has spoilt all the dogs that has fought him. Jacco Maccacco is nothing but a hout and houter, Sir, and is vell vorth your notice...”

The fight takes place at Westminster Pit, where the friends encounter a motley group of dustmen, lamplighters, stage-coachmen, bakers, farmers, butchers – but also barristers, honourables, sprigs of the nobility and M.P.s – “all in one rude contact, jostling and pushing against each other ... to procure a front seat.” The stench is overwhelming, but they all gaze avidly as the monkey, with his sharp teeth, overcomes the fighting dogs twice his size. Jerry, who has bet on Jacco, wins some blunt.¹⁵

In Chapter XI Jerry is finally introduced to Tom’s mistress. Kate has invited him to bring his friends to tea, and when they arrive, presents them to her dear friend, Susan. After tea, Bob is asked to play the piano; he soon requests Tom and Kate to perform the “elegant but lascivious waltz”. (This is the scene recalled by Thackeray.) The illustration also shows Jerry flirting with “the lovely Sue” upon the sofa. Seduced and abandoned, she is now looking for a new “protector”. She is not at all averse to Jerry’s seeing her home.

A few days later Tom and Jerry follow the two ladies as they are on their way to consult a fortune-teller. Like his heroes, Egan considers “the old Hag” and others of her ilk to be typical London charlatans, out to cheat the credulous of their money. But he does not see, as Dickens might have, the pathos in this quest of the two young women. As kept mistresses, their fate is highly uncertain. What will become of them when their youth and beauty wane? Can Tom and Jerry be prevailed upon to marry them? Or to give them a settlement that will preserve them from want?

The chapter ends with a visit of Tom, Jerry and Logic, escorting Kate and Sue, to the royal palace, Carlton House, which Egan describes room by room in true guidebook fashion. All agree that the palace is the Ne Plus Ultra of London Life.¹⁶

Chapter XII starts somberly with the trio’s visit to the Condemned-Yard at Newgate Prison. As Thackeray described, they watch the irons being knocked off the legs of a convict who is about to be hanged. One of the condemned men, a gentleman and a former friend of Logic, had squandered his fortune and sunk into crime; Bob is visiting him for the last time, and promises to take his dying message to “a female to whom he had been very much attached.” From the gloomy prison, the friends go to the Royal Stock

Exchange, where Tom points out the merchants there assembled and remarks on their talents. “The name of an English Merchant is a passport in any country,” he declares.

To finish the day, they decide to see “a bit of life” at All-Max in the East End. (The name is Egan’s take-off on the exclusive Almack’s in the West End.)

All-Max required no introductions; people paired off and danced with one another according to fancy;... nothing was thought of about birth and distinction. All was happiness, everybody free and easy, and freedom of expression allowed to the very echo.... Lascars, blacks, jack tars, coal-heavers, dustmen, women of colour, old and young, and a sprinkling of once fine girls, were all jigging together,... Heavy wet was the cooling beverage, but frequently overtaken by flashes of lightning.

The next afternoon, for “the clock had struck three before Tom and his Coz were able to lift their damaged heads from the pillow”, they determine on spending the evening at the true ALMACK’S, where “the very air you inhale is different from the plebeian atmosphere, being scented with the evaporations of the essences and richest perfumes from all quarters of the Globe.” Tom tells Jerry that an “invitation to this climax of RANK is of the utmost consequence to enterprising men, operating as an important PASSPORT to every other place of high breeding in the kingdom.” He warns Jerry to “mind his P’s and Q’s” and to invoke Lethe, the goddess of forgetfulness, to help him avoid all the lower-class slang he has acquired elsewhere. The two “sport a toe” (dance) with some of the people of rank and breeding assembled there, but find the place less entertaining than the seedy ALL-MAX of the night before.¹⁷

Tempus fugit in the Metropolis. Chapter XIII finds the trio “sporting their blunt” – that is, winning their bets – at the Royal Cockpit. But they soon lose their winnings to a group of card-sharks who have invited them out to dinner in order to recoup their own betting losses. The plate shows one of the cheaters peeking at Jerry’s hand of cards through a mirror. This episode is called “a friendly game of whist”. Later, the friends “lark” at the Grand Carnival and take a stroll to the London Docks, where they taste “Wine in the Wood” – in a barrel. They attend the Italian Opera and meet the cast of *Don Giovanni* in the green-room.¹⁸

In Chapter XIV they make the most of an evening at Vauxhall, which Tom considers “above anything in Paris.” “Pleasure holds her court at Vauxhall,” he declares. To Logic, it is the “festival of LOVE AND HARMONY, and produces a most happy mixture of society”.

If eating... is the object in view, you will perceive tables laid out in every box.... If drinking, the punch is so prime... that it will make you as lively as a harlequin. If inclined to waltz or reel, partners can be procured without the formality of a master of ceremonies.... If promenading is your forte, you will find illuminated walks of the most interesting and animated description.... It

is all free and easy – stay as long as you like, and depart when you think proper.

The trio enjoy themselves thoroughly at Vauxhall until daylight forces them to think of home. As usual, Logic is nowhere to be found, so Tom and Jerry return to Corinthian House without him.

The next day they attend an exhibition of paintings at the Royal Academy at Somerset House, where they are amused by the “trite and elegant” remarks about the pictures uttered by the two fashionable Misses Trifles.

Rejoined by Logic, they now decide to disguise themselves in order to attend a gathering of the Cadgers. These are professional beggars who pretend poverty and disability so as to cadge charity from the unsuspecting public. They meet at Noah’s Ark, in the slang of the Oxonian, in the back slums of the Holy Land – the worst section of London. The three friends observe the cadgers as they take off wooden legs, give back borrowed children, and laugh at the gullibility of the charitable.

Three days then pass without Tom and Jerry’s having seen Logic. He is now in trouble, and lets them know that he is blown up at Point Non-Plus – that is, broke and so heavily in debt that two arresting officers are at his lodgings in the Albany. Tom and Jerry condole with him and promise to visit him now that he will always be “at home”.¹⁹

The final chapter describes their visit to Bob at the “Whistling-Shop” on board the Fleet – that is, at the Fleet-Street debtors’ prison. But Logic is not too disconsolate as he finds himself among the best company. Besides, he will be allowed to leave the prison for short intervals in order to try and settle his affairs: this privilege he calls his “pony” or his “horse”.

When Tom and Jerry leave the Fleet, it is raining and they arrive home soaked through, not having been able to find a “rattler” (cab). Jerry develops such a bad cold that Dr. Please’em, the society physician, is called. He tells Jerry:

My dear Sir, you have been trotting too hard. As a good sportman, you should have had more respect for your cattle. Your nag has got the worst of it. You should have pulled in rather sooner; but I am in hopes that a small taste more of physic and a little training in the vicinity of Hawthorn Hall will put you all to rights again.

Shortly thereafter Jerry is sufficiently recovered to undertake the journey home. Logic takes advantage of his White Pony to accompany his friends to the White Horse Cellar in Piccadilly, where the time for the stage-coach’s departure is fast approaching.

The hearty grasps of the hand, and the good-byes were over between Hawthorn and his pals, and TOM and LOGIC were only waiting to see the coach depart, when JERRY said, “My dear COZ,” but the coach was now

rattling over the stones, and the last broken sentence which the ear of the CORINTHIAN caught, was “mention me in the kindest manner to the lovely SUE; tell her I am only going into training, and in the course of a few weeks I shall most certainly return to London to enjoy a few more Sprees ... and also to have with her the pleasure of another game at---”²⁰

Life in London ends thus, in mid-sentence, and without any definite conclusion. Its fantastic success induced Egan to attempt a sequel, published in monthly installments in 1827 and as a book in 1828. It was called *The Finish to the Adventures of Tom, Jerry and Logic, in their Pursuits through Life In and Out of London*. The plot is better constructed and the characterization somewhat deeper than in the original work. The story begins where *Life in London* left off, with Jerry on his way home. A fat, jovial knight, Sir John Blubber, climbs upon the roof of the coach; he is a wealthy, self-made man, now retired from business, and with a benevolent disposition – “surely, the crude original of Mr. Pickwick.” He makes friends with Jerry as they are approaching the obscure little town of Pickwick, Somersetshire, now receiving its first mention in literature. Jerry invites Sir John to Hawthorn Hall, where they are given a warm welcome, “full of Dickensian exuberance and family feeling.” They are joined by Tom and Bob Logic, who find “one continuous scene of gaiety, hospitality and friendship”, very much like Dingley Dell at Christmas. Eventually, all four go back to London to visit those places of interest they have not yet seen. They explore the “great Bore”, the London conduit, and are soaked “by an unexpected influx of water”. They go to Bartholomew Fair to see a performance at “Muster” Richardson’s theatre. They attend a party given by the Duchess of Do-Good, and then go to the Finish, a tavern used by the market-people of Covent Garden and a favorite spot for slumming. Next day Sir John takes the trio to the dock yards at Chatham, where they see a company of convicts on their way to the Hulks. They attend the fashionable Ascot Races and then, by contrast, those at Epsom, where the Cockneys spend their holidays.

Now the story takes on a cautionary tone. Tom has been neglecting Kate; she is unfaithful to him with a military gentleman, and is cast off. She gradually sinks lower and lower in the social scale, with ever humbler “protectors”. Finally, she takes to drink and is forced to walk the streets as a common prostitute. One night the friends come upon her, “drunk, diseased and starving”. Tom is shocked and remorseful; Bob and Jerry try to arrange for her rescue and rehabilitation. But she disappears again, takes poison, and dies. Jerry himself narrowly escapes death from fire in a brothel. Logic dies, presumably of dissipation, but still full of puns and jests. Jerry returns home, taking Tom with him. In a riding accident, Tom breaks his neck, leaving Jerry as the only survivor of the trio. He marries Mary Rosebud, the daughter of a neighbor, and settles into the life of a country squire.²¹

Despite its being a better novel than *Life in London*, *Finish* had but a modest success. No doubt its darker tone contributed to its more muted reception by the reading public. But times were changing by 1828; the outlook and sensibilities later known as “Victorian” were already beginning to develop. By the time that Charles Dickens

published his earliest piece, “Mr. Minns and his Cousin”, in the *Monthly Magazine* of December, 1833, the alteration was apparent.

Pierce Egan was a son of the late eighteenth century, who reached full maturity during the Regency; his attitudes were typical of those periods. His writings are never bawdy or prurient, but he casts an unflinching eye on such social realities as the prevalence of prostitution and the patronage of brothels by gentlemen. He

...accepts the social hierarchy of his day and is as unaware as the bulk of his contemporaries of the increasing fragmentation of society and the concomitant problems of which the Victorians were to be keenly conscious.... He is, too, a man of Regency days in his toleration of eccentricity... in his insularity and ... complacency about the place of Britain in the world, in his conviction that the social divisions of his day were natural and inevitable, in his lack of interest in social questions...²²

One can readily see the difference between Egan’s uncritical acceptance of the existence of the gin-shops and Dickens’s indignant and reformist comments:

Well-disposed gentlemen, and charitable ladies, would alike turn with coldness and disgust from a description of the drunken besotted men, and wretched broken-down miserable women, ...forgetting, in the pleasant consciousness of their own high rectitude, the poverty of the one, and the temptation of the other. Gin-drinking is a great vice in England, but poverty is a greater; and until you can cure it, or persuade a half-famished wretch not to seek relief in the temporary oblivion of his own misery, ...gin-shops will increase in number and splendour.²³

Dickens certainly mentions prostitutes, though in somewhat veiled language, but he never describes their activities, haunts, and appearance in the light-hearted way in which Egan does. “Cyprians” (followers of Venus and Cyprus) abound in *Life in London* and in *Finish* as well. They are distinguished by such adjectives as “fair”, “dashing” and “elegant” so long as they are in the upper ranks of their profession; when they have sunk to the bottom, they are called “lumps of infamy and disease.” Egan’s account of prostitution, says one critic, is “double-voiced, mixing the language of disgust and desire. The foot-notes often contain a critique of prostitution, whereas the main text offers a celebration of it.”²⁴

Another point of divergence between Egan and Dickens is the social class upon which they focus. While Dickens’s interest is largely in the middle class, Egan invites his readers into a

carnavalesque world from which the related disciplines of time and work have been banished....middle-class London is essentially conspicuous by its absence.... Egan’s London is the sporting capital of England. He gives little or no sense of the ways in which it was also the financial and political capital. His working-class characters are seen only at play.²⁵

Needless to say, Corinthian Tom, Jerry Hawthorn and Bob Logic never work! Egan's view is that

Each class has its own duties, its own pleasures, its own problems.... For him the contemporary order of society is a natural one.... He does not hesitate to show destitution, although for him it is circumstance of character that is to blame, rather than society. He is all the time certain that the poor have at least as much fun as the rich.²⁶

He virtually ignores the middle class, as did most of his contemporaries; this class was not yet as pervasive or as influential as it would soon become.

To Victorians like Dickens, who wished to disassociate themselves from the looseness of the Regency and to

...establish a norm of decorum and genteel behaviour, Egan ... seemed to sum up all that was coarse and least desirable in his age. He was vulgar... especially by Victorian standards.... Most... were reluctant to give him credit... and preferred to ignore his existence; ... yet, although they were silent about his work, they had little hesitation in plundering it for their own.²⁷

In particular, Egan should be considered as an important influence on Dickens's early writings. As Professor Fred Schwarzbach of Kent State University has reminded us, Dickens began his career as a journalist. He was not so much a "literary" author as a popular one. John C. Reid concurs:

His models, the kind of writers he set out to rival, were not those that David Copperfield read... exclusively, ... but the mass entertainers of his age: Theodore Hook, Reynolds, the *Newgate Calendar*, Bulwer Lytton, Pierce Egan... For all the effect upon him of novelists like Goldsmith and Smollett, the roots of Dickens the novelist are deep in the soil of cheap popular writing. Among such writers, Pierce Egan is in many ways the closest to Dickens. Certainly, contemporary readers took it for granted that the younger novelist owed a debt to the older one.... Dickens, of course, drew as much from his own detailed observation of life as Egan did himself. Yet ... [he] owed more to the creator of Tom and Jerry than to almost any other contemporary.²⁸

The two writers had a good deal in common. Both came from poor families, one clinging precariously to a middle-class status, the other sunk into the working-class.

Both knew childhoods of poverty and drudgery; both had early experience of life in its grimmer and harsher aspects; both were, to a very large extent, self-educated,... Both taught themselves shorthand, reported parliamentary debates, were expert journalists and editors. They were both passionately attached to the theatre, and able actors in limited roles.... Both were

absorbingly interested in crimes of violence, especially murders, and in prisons,... The two men likewise had a special love for London... Egan as a shrewdly observant reporter, Dickens as its great imaginative poet.... And, finally, the two writers possessed abnormal drive, energy, and resilience, being notably and consistently productive.²⁹

Egan was the first to give “a faithful and friendly portrayal of the Cockney... without a trace of condescension,” as well as of typical Londoners of the early nineteenth century:

... The costermongers and their wives, the coachmen, the small traders,... the horse-dealers, the grog-shop proprietors, the publicans, the coal-heavers, the swells, the pickpockets, the fences, the card-sharps,... The fake beggars, the lascars, the prostitutes, the bibulous old women and the hard-drinking young gentlemen, the seduced young girls now kept mistresses, the carousers in wayside taverns, the bankrupts in debtors’ prisons, the families of working-class people having a pleasant day out at Epsom or on the Thames, the gay crowds at Vauxhall. Here, brought into print for the first time, is the world of characters Dickens was to make his own and give immortality to.³⁰

Sketches by Boz contains references to all kinds of people, places and things already known to Egan’s readers:

Jemmy Catnach of Seven Dials, Almack’s, Astley’s Royal Amphitheatre, the Royal Coburg, the slums.... Belcher handkerchiefs, ... the dance at Greenwich Fair, private theatres and their offerings, the entertainers at “harmony meetings”, a trip to the Bore, costermongers, cab-drivers ... and slang.

“It is curious,” Reid comments, “how many aspects of London life, already described by Egan, the young Dickens elected to write about.” Specifically, he depicts Vauxhall Gardens in terms similar to Egan’s:

There are even such similar details in both Vauxhall accounts as Dickens’s comment on the ham served... “that the carvers were exercised in the mystic art of cutting a moderate-sized ham into slices thin enough to pave the whole of the grounds”, and Egan’s reference to “ham-shavings, ...that from its transparent quality... might answer the purpose of a sky-light!”

Egan makes much of “Muster” Richardson’s traveling theatre, while Richardson is one of the main features of Dickens’s piece on Bartholomew Fair. “In view of such resemblances,” writes Reid, “it is not surprising, remembering Bob Logic and his trademark green spectacles, to come across one young man similarly adorned in *Sketches by Boz*. This is Mr. Edkins in ‘The Steam Excursion’”.³¹

Not only do Dickens's early works belong to the same world as Egan's, but he himself was aware of being in competition with popular fiction like the *Life in London* books. Yet, continues Reid,

...while finding material and occasionally inspiration in Egan, Dickens, by temperament and class, found himself opposed to almost everything that Egan seemed to him to stand for: Regency looseness, irresponsible Corinthianism, sporting mania, physical brutality, coarseness of outlook and language, lack of refinement in manners, social divisions, monarchical decadence, and vulgarity. He never... shows the least sympathy with the Regency period and is quick to parody its manners and caricature its people.

But at least in his early books, Dickens is, "closer in the happy vulgarity of his tone, in his delight in eccentrics, humble folk and Cockney crowds enjoying themselves, and in his attempts to reproduce the speech of the people to Egan... than he is to the great novelists of his own age..."³² The creative gulf between them is immense; in the light of Dickens's blazing genius, Egan's tiny taper cannot be glimpsed."³³ Yet the world of Boz and that of Tom and Jerry's London "resemble each other at so many points that... it is as though Egan had opened the highway down which Dickens so triumphantly drove."³⁴

Joan Freilich, 1998

Notes

- ¹ Hotten, Introduction, *Life in London*, 1-9.
- ² Reid, *Bucks and Bruisers: Pierce Egan and Regency England*, 204.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 200.
- ⁴ Ford, Introduction, *Boxiana*, 8-9.
- ⁵ Hotten, 9-17.
- ⁶ Thomson, "Egan, Pierce", 531.
- ⁷ Chew, "The Novel between Scott and Dickens," 1277.
- ⁸ Egan, *Life in London*, 1-33; 50-52.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 71-8.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 98-113.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 119-21.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 134-7.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 188-205.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 215-28.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 249-60.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 294-307.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 319-44.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 345-65.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 366-79.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 382-405.
- ²¹ Reid, 140-8.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 197-8.
- ²³ Dickens, "Gin-Shops," in *Sketches by Boz*, 220.
- ²⁴ Sales, "Pierce Egan and the Representation of London," 161.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.
- ²⁶ Reid, 68.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 203-4.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 209-10.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 218.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 206.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

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