

A PHENOMENON IN A SMOCK FROCK.

A COMIC DRAMA,

IN ONE ACT.

BY

WILLIAM BROUGH,

AUTHOR OF

"*Apartments*," "*House out of Windows*," "*Those Dear Blacks*,"
"Uncle Tom's Crib,"
&c. &c. &c.

THOMAS HAILES LACY,

WELLINGTON STREET, STRAND,
LONDON.

909401

First Produced at the Royal Lyceum Theatre,
on Monday, December 18th, 1852.

CHARACTERS.

MR. SOWERBERRY	MR. FRANK MATTHEWS.
JOHN BUTTERCUP* (a Milkman) . .	MR. CHARLES MATHEWS.
MR. BARKER	MR. H. HORNCastle.
JAMES (Sowerberry's Servant) . . .	MR. TEMPLETON.
MRS. BARKER	MISS FANNY BAKER.
BETSEY CHIRRUP { Sowerberry's Housekeeper }	MISS C. MITCHELL.

* This character should be played with a strong Somersetshire dialect.

PERIOD—PRESENT.

COSTUMES.

SOWERBERRY.—Old-fashioned black suit. At his first entrance, a large flowered dressing-gown; afterwards, a broad-tailed coat.

BUTTERCUP.—Cord breeches, gaiters, thick hob-nailed boots, white smock-frock, glazed hat with name of dairy painted on it, cotton handkerchief round his neck, milk-pails and yoke. 2nd Dress—Take off smock-frock and gaiters, having blue worsted stockings under them; put on black tailed coat.

BARKER.—Genteel walking dress, frock coat, &c.

JAMES.—Servant's livery.

MRS. BARKER.—Slate-coloured silk dress, yellow bonnet, red shawl.

BETSEY CHIRRUP.—Cotton dress.

Time in Performance—Fifty Minutes.

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A

PHENOMENON IN A SMOCK FROCK.

SCENE.—*A Drawing Room, neatly furnished.—Practicable doors C., R., and L.—A Window L.C.—Sofa R.—Table, with writing materials, R.—Each character entering from the garden, is first seen to pass the window from L., and knock at door.*

Enter BETSEY CHIRRUP C., meeting JAMES R.H.D.

JAMES. (R.) Oh, Mrs. Chirrup!—mind, master isn't at home to anybody to-day.

CHIR. (L.) Not at home—eh, James? Ah! just like him. Of all the old owls that ever lived— But there, I say nothing.

JAMES. People call him a misanthrope. What's that, Mrs. Chirrup?

CHIR. Oh, I don't know, James, I can't talk French. But what's he doing now?

JAMES. Well; just now he's shaving. He's had his breakfast, and he says he shall go back to bed again.

CHIR. And stop there all day, I'll warrant him, as he says, to see as little as possible of his fellow creatures; I never saw such a man, he can't bear the sight of a human being—hates everything and everybody.

SOWER. (*outside, R.H.*) There, there, just the way with them all,

CHIR. He's coming, and in a precious temper. Come, James, let's get out of his way for goodness' sake.

Exeunt C.D.

SOWERBERRY, *in a dressing gown, enters R.H.D. gloomily, he has a razor in his hand, and his chin partly covered with soap.*

Why was I born of woman—why did not nature rather make of me a dog—a mouse—a hippopotamus—anything but man? Here, now, I bought this razor yesterday; 'twas warranted to cut—it won't cut, and yet I'm blamed for not loving the human race. Love them, indeed! a set of thieves and swindlers! there's no truth nor honesty in the world. The other day I wanted a pair of gloves—I saw some in a shop window plainly marked 2s., I went in, I bought a pair, and then I found 11*½*d. marked in microscopic characters, and in the

A PHENOMENON

faintest pencil. Disgusted with this piece of infamy, and sick at heart, I rushed into a tavern, called for brandy—bah, they gave me British ! and yet I'm expected to love mankind. They're all alike. There's my pocket-book I lost last night, with fifty pounds in it. Where could I have dropped that ? where ! what matter where. It's all the same, whoever finds it he'll not be honest enough to bring it back, although my name's in it. Honest, pshaw ! there's no such thing as an honest man. Diogenes might have saved himself some pounds of candles if he knew the world as well as I do—they're all swindlers and liars ; why should I mix with them ? Why should I even see them—I wont. No ! I'll go back to bed again. Here, James, James, I say. Now, there's another specimen of human nature. I've called that fellow twice, and he pretends he doesn't hear me. And yet I'm expected to love my fellow creatures. James, I say !

Enter JAMES, C.D.

JAMES. Yes, Sir.

SOWER. (r.) Yes Sir ! Now there's a fellow that will lie to my very face.

JAMES. (l.) Did you call, Sir ?

SOWER. Did I call ! Falsehood ! Deceit ! As if he didn't know I called ! Come here James, look me in the face, and tell me the truth for once. How do I look this morning ?

JAMES. Sir ! (*aside*) What is he at ?

SOWER. Come, no equivocation, speak.

JAMES. Well, Sir, I haven't seen you look so well, Sir, for a long time.

SOWER. Indeed !

JAMES. No, Sir, your complexion is as clear as a young baby's, Sir.

SOWER. It's false, you scoundrel ! my complexion's like a Flanders brick. Leave me, I'll have no more of your falsehoods—go, leave my house this instant,

JAMES. Oh, Sir, I've been a good servant to you.

SOWER. You've not. There are no good servants. Go, never let me see your face again.

Exit JAMES, C.D.

—I'll have no servants. I'll live alone, and emulate the happy oyster—never leave my bed, and dwell secluded in my peaceful shell. Oh ! would I had been born an oyster ! Then, the wounds my spirit has received already might, in my calm retirement, produce rich pearls of wisdom. As it is—(*a knock is heard*) What's that ?

CHIR. (*outside c.*) No, Sir, Mr. Sowerberry is not at home.

BAR. (*outside*) Nonsense ! He's always at home to me.

SOWER. Barker ! The devil take him !

CHIR. But he's not, Sir, really.

BAR. Pooh, pooh ! He's never out this time of day.

Enter BARKER, C.D.

— Ah, here he is, of course. Ha ! my dear friend.

SOWER. (*aside, R.*) Dear friend!—the hypocrite! (*aloud*) Good morning.

BAR. (*L.*) Well, and how are you?

SOWER. Ill.

BAR. You don't say so? Now, do you know what brought me here?

SOWER. No. (*aside*) I wish I knew what would take him away again.

BAR. Why, my wife dreamt last night that you were not well; so I could not rest until I knew the truth.

SOWER. Oh! your wife dreamt of me, did she? Ah! she's a charming little woman. I suppose she's as virtuous as she is beautiful, eh?

BAR. Damme, Sir, what do you mean by that?

SOWER. Nothing. I mean, you're never jealous—never suspect anything wrong.

BAR. Eh? Why? Have you any reason to suspect?

SOWER. No—I wish I had.

BAR. Eh?

SOWER. That I might have the pleasure of telling you—that's all. There are beautiful women, you know, whose husbands are not so comfortable—

BAR. (*aside*) What can he mean? (*aloud*) My dear friend, if you have heard anything, I'm sure you will tell me.

SOWER. Of course I should.

BAR. I know you would—you, my old, best friend!

SOWER. (*aside*) He wants to ask a favour.

BAR. By the bye, you can do me a great service.

SOWER. (*aside*) I thought so.

BAR. I am in the most pressing want of fifty pounds. It's only for a day or two; but I must have it to-day. Now, I know I can depend on you. There is no other man living I would ask such a favour of.

SOWER. I am very sorry; I haven't so much in the house.

BAR. No, but you will get it for me—I know you will. I'll come back in half-an-hour. I won't trouble you to send it to me.

SOWER. Indeed! You're very kind.

BAR. Oh! not at all. Here, write me a cheque. I'll go to the Bank myself—save you sending.

SOWER. No, I'm going there myself directly.

BAR. That's right, a walk will do you good. By-the-bye, you're looking very well in spite of what you say.

SOWER. Am I? That's the style!

BAR. Good morning. I'll be back in half an hour.

Exit C.D.

SOWER. I'm looking very well!—flattery, falsehood! Bah! they're all alike. Why can't men speak the truth! The proverb says it isn't right to do so at all times. Egad, I wish they'd try it; I know 'twould never hurt me if folks told me truth all day! And he'll come back in half an hour—will he?

Goes to bell R.H. and rings violently—Enter BETSEY CHIRRUP, C.D.

— When Mr. Barker calls again, tell him I'm gone to Windsor—Birmingham—Australia—anywhere.

CHIR. Yes, Sir.

SOWER. Mind, if you let him see me again to-day, I'll strangle you.

Exit R.H.D.

CHIR. Well, I'm sure—whatever is the matter with him to-day? He's worse than ever. (*knock is heard*)

BUT. (*outside*) Miaou!

CHIR. (*looking out of window*) Why, I declare there's the afternoon milk already. Well, Mr. Buttercup really is a very nice-looking young man, and since master is so ill-tempered, I've positively a good mind to—

BUTTERCUP appears C.D. attired in a long smock frock, with milk pails, yoke, &c.

BUT. Miaou! Where be ye all?—why don't 'e come to door?—eh? Why, door be open.

CHIR. Good gracious! Mr. Buttercup, what are you doing here in the parlour with your milk pails?

BUT. Now don't ye speak cross to I, Mrs. Chirrup, you know I can't bear it from you. I be come with the milk. How be ye to-day, Ma'am?—be ye pretty bobbish?

CHIR. But to come in here. Why, if Mr. Sowerberry saw you—

BUT. Well, I don't mind telling you, Mrs. Chirrup—that's just what I be come for. I've got a little business with him.

CHIR. Business? You?

BUT. Yes, I, so where is he? I've got no time to lose—

CHIR. But you can't see him.

BUT. But I tell ye I must. Where be he?—in here? (*going to room, R.H.*)

CHIR. No, don't go there—he's fast asleep in bed.

BUT. In bed! what, and just upon half arter two o'clock. It's fall time he were up, that's all I know. (*knocks at door, R.H.*) Here, come, get up I say. Miaou!

(*sings*) “Wake, wake, ye drowsy sleepers,
 Awake, awake, 'tis almost day,
 And put your head out of the window,
 To hear what your true lovier has to say.”

CHIR. Good Heavens! what are you about? He's coming! Won't he be in a rage—come away, he'll murder us.

Exit CHIRRUP, C.

SOWER. (*entering*) What is the meaning of this? Who are you, fellow? How dare you disturb me?

BUT. (L.) Disturb you, at half arter two o'clock! Why, you ought to be ashamed of yourself—in bed on a fine day like this!

SOWER. (R.) What do you want? Who are you?

BUT. Well, Sir, I be John Buttercup, as do serve this house with milk.

SOWER. Milk! (*goes up towards milk pails*)

BUT. There, don't ye look at my pails in that manner, or you'll turn all the milk sour.

SOWER. What do you want? Speak quickly.

BUT. Well, in my early rounds this morning, I happened to pick up something not far from here—

SOWER. What's that to me?

BUT. Well, I be coming to that if you'll only hold your gab. When I got home I found—but stop, mayhap I be wrong. Have you lost anything?

SOWER. Lost?—eh?—yes, a pocket-book.

BUT. There, now, didn't I tell ye?

SOWER. And you have found it?

BUT. Wait a bit; mayhap it bean't yourn after all. What colour war it?

SOWER. Black.

BUT. And what was inside of it?

SOWER. Bank notes.

BUT. How much?

SOWER. Fifty pounds.

BUT. (*giving book*) All right. There you be. Take care of it next time. Now, good bye to ye. (*going*)

SOWER. My pocket-book returned? Is it possible? What!—going? Here, you—what's your name?—milkman!

BUT. Eh? What's the matter? It be all right, bean't it?

SOWER. But you forget. I have not rewarded you for your trouble in bringing it back.

BUT. Oh! no trouble at all, thank'ee,—I were coming this way with the milk.

SOWER. Well, for your honesty, then.

BUT. Get out with ye! A man bean't honest for the sake of being paid for it.

SOWER. Well, you will accept of this half-sovereign.

BUT. What should I take your half-sovereign for? I've done nothing to earn it.

SOWER. You won't take it?

BUT. No!

SOWER. (*aside*) What can he mean? It's not enough, perhaps. (*aloud*) Here, then—a sovereign.

BUT. Now, do you take me for such a scamp that I can't do a honest action without taking money for it?

SOWER. Two sovereigns.

BUT. Now, I'll just tell ye what it is. If you go on tempting me with your confounded sovereigns and half-sovereigns, I'll give you the finest hiding you've had for many a long day. So there! Good bye to ye! (*going c.*)

SOWER. (*aside*) What a splendid burst of virtuous indignation! Is it possible, that beneath that lowly garb I have at length disco-

vered the phenomenon—an honest man? (*aloud*) Here, stop, my friend—my worthy friend. What did you say your name was?

BUT. John Buttercup.

SOWER. John Buttercup, you are a magnificent fellow!

BUT. Be I? Well, it's more than I can say for you, old chap, at any rate.

SOWER. Superb! Untainted by the vice of flattery, too!—Can it be possible? Wonderful creature, look at me, and tell the truth!

BUT. What's the matter with ye? I always do tell truth.

SOWER. You do, I'm sure.

BUT. Yes, down in the parts I come from they used to call I Honest John, 'cause I never could make up a good lie. I did try once, when I were at school; and lor, didn't old master wallop I for it! I never tried afterwards. Poor old master!—he's been transported since that for sheep-stealing.

SOWER. 'Tis useless to apply the test. But look at me. Say, how do I look this morning?

BUT. Well, the same as you always look when I see you—darnation ugly.

SOWER. (R.) Candour itself! Magnificent!—And my complexion?

BUT. (L.) Like a rotten apple.

SOWER. Delightful!—And my walk? (*walks to L.*)

BUT. Like a lame duck in a farm-yard.

SOWER. Sublime!

BUT. But I can't stop here all day, paying you compliments like this—I must be off. (*going*)

SOWER. No—do not leave me.

BUT. Why? What nonsense you be talking! What's to become of my business?

SOWER. A great idea! I'll do it! Hear me, friend. In your low walk of life—

BUT. A low walk? Get along with ye! Mine's as respectable a milk-walk as any going.

SOWER. I don't mean that. But tell me—what do you earn now, on the average, by your business?

BUT. Why do you ax? Be you the collector of Income-tax?

SOWER. No. Answer me, I beg.

BUT. Well, if you must know, about eighteen shillings a week.

SOWER. No more?

BUT. No. I might perhaps make more, if I did as some folks do—put all sorts of rubbish in the milk. But hang it, when I see the cows looking so innocent-like at me, I haven't the heart to bring disgrace upon them.

SOWER. Great creature! would you like that income doubled—trebled?

BUT. Well, yes, of course I should.

SOWER. Then live with me—share my heart and home.

BUT. Live with you?—what for?

SOWER. For two pound ten—three pounds a week.

BUT. And what to do for it?

SOWER. Do? Speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

BUT. Why, that's nothing. Any fool can speak the truth.

SOWER. True; but how few are fools enough to do it! Listen,—I am surrounded by knavery and falsehood. Your task shall be to root up these filthy weeds as fast as they appear. Is it a bargain?

BUT. Three pounds a week? Yes! But stop; p'r'aps after the first week you'll change your mind, and turn me out of doors.

SOWER. Never! I pledge my word of honour!

BUT. Oh yes!—a deal men care about honour, when it don't suit them to keep their promise. No,—good day! (*going*)

SOWER. What beautiful contempt for the human race!—Stay,—we'll make an agreement in writing. Will that do?

BUT. Eh?

SOWER. Yes; I'll take you on a lease for seven years.

BUT. A lease? Three pounds a week, mind.

SOWER. (*writing at table R.*) Yes, and your board.

BUT. Exactly! A lease for seven years, and you to keep the inside in good condition.

SOWER. (*still writing*) Eureka! I've found an honest man at last! He's mine! Now sign it.

BUT. Stop a minute. Have you mentioned the three pounds a week? All right,—I see it. (*signs*) Now you.

SOWER. (*signs*) There! Now at length I'm happy. Truth, virtue, honesty—and all for a hundred and fifty pounds a year!

BUT. Three pounds a week? I might carry milk a long while afore I made that.—Now, Sir, come, set me to work.

Enter BETSEY CHIRRUP C.D.

SOWER. (C.) Just in the nick of time. Buttercup, my friend, you may begin at once.

BUT. (*puts pails outside C.D.*)

SOWER. Come, Mrs. Chirrup, let's see your housekeeping accounts for the week.

CHIR. (L.) Sir, I don't understand you.

SOWER. Your accounts, I say!

CHIR. Well, if you must have them, there! (*gives book*) (*aside*) What's the matter now?

SOWER. Now then, my friend, hear this, and give me your opinion. (*reads*) "Bread, 18s."

BUT. (R.) Eighteen shillings' worth of bread, and the quartern loaf at sixpence?

CHIR. Eightpence three-farthings, as I'm a living woman!

BUT. Sixpence, I tell ye.

CHIR. Eightpence three-farthings, Sir.

SOWER. So, three of us have eaten nearly forty quartern loaves. (*reads*) "Leg of mutton, 10s. 6d."

BUT. Too much by 3s. 6d. at least.

CHIR. Sir, if I am to be treated in this way—

SOWER. Silence! (*reads*) "Milk, 2s."

BUT. What's that?—milk?

SOWER. Two shillings.

BUT. Oh, Sir! excuse me if my feelings carry I away; (*crosses to c.*) but as a milkman and a gentleman, I solemnly assure you that three-ha'porth a day was all that lovely young 'oman—that lying young 'oman—ever took.

CHIR. (*aside to him*) My dear Mr. Buttercup, you will not betray me?

BUT. My heart be tender, but my principles be tough,—I love the gal, but expose the servant; and I repeat, three-ha'porth!

CHIR. Penn'orths!

BUT. Ha'porths!

CHIR. True, Sir, I did but take three-ha'porth of this man; but then, his milk was such vile stuff—

BUT. What's that?

CHIR. I was obliged to deal elsewhere as well.

BUT. What!—abuse my milk?

CHIR. Milk? Stuff! Calves' brains, and chalk and water.

BUT. I deny it! I never used a bit of chalk in all my born days,—and as for brains, such a thing never entered my head!

CHIR. I repeat it!

BUT. I deny it!

SOWER. (c.) Hold! (*gets between them*) Here's a scene for a painter! Truth on one side—Falsehood on the other; and in the midst, myself—calm, dignified, serene! Buttercup, you are sublime!

BUT. (l.) Mayhap I be; but she only had three-ha'porth—and the best milk ever sold.

CHIR. (r.) Three pen'orth, if I die for it.

SOWER. Go, my friend—dinner's nearly ready—go and take off that smock frock.

BUT. Yes, I'll go and fetch my Sunday clothes.

SOWER. No,—go into that room—take the best coat you can find in all my wardrobe. Henceforth, consider everything I have your own.

BUT. (*going*) You're very kind;—you be goin' to keep the outside in repair as well. But she only took three-ha'porths.

CHIR. Penn'orths!

BUT. Ha'porths, I tell ye!

Exit R.H.D.

CHIR. Mr. Sowerberry, if I'm to have spies put over me like this, you'll please to get another housekeeper.

SOWER. What! part with you? Never! You are invaluable to me. Your wickedness and depravity are necessary for the dark background to make my honest friend stand out in bold relief.

CHIR. But since you have lost confidence in me—

SOWER. Lost confidence? Not in the least,—I never had any!

CHIR. Well, Sir, you'll allow me to give you a month's warning.

SOWER. Certainly not; go to the kitchen—rob me—ruin me—but you shall never leave me!

CHIR. A month to-day, Sir, if you please. Your servant, Sir.

Exit C.D.

SOWER. Part with that woman, never ! Day by day I'll witness the sublime spectacle of truth triumphant over falsehood. He comes, stupendous being !

Enter BUTTERCUP, R.H. in a coat and waistcoat of SOWERBERRY'S

BUT. (R.) Well, I don't think much of this coat of yours.

SOWER. (L.) What, can so great a mind be sullied with ingratitude ?

BUT. Oh, gratitude's nothing to do with it, I'm much obliged to you for the coat of course, only if I said I liked it when I don't, it wouldn't be telling the truth you know.

SOWER. No, no, to be sure ! Here, give me that coat and you take this.

BUT. Eh ! oh, no ! Well, I've got the best of the two at any rate. Oh, what a guy !

SOWER. Why, what's the matter with this one ? It fits me, doesn't it ?

BUT. Yes, I suppose it fits as well as anything could fit such a hommadod of a figure.

SOWER. Well, you needn't be personal.

BUT. Good lord ! here's an arm—all skin and bone.

SOWER. Mr. Buttercup, these remarks are, to say the least, uncalled for.

BUT. Why, I be only speaking the truth.

SOWER. Enough, Sir ; on a stand in my room you will find a wig, go and fetch it me.

BUT. What, you wear wigs too, do you ? Why what a battered old scarecrow you be—there beant nothing real about ye.

SOWER. Go, Sir. It is a new one just come home, this one is getting rather shabby.

BUT. Well, you do look a good deal like a mangey old badger, I must say.

Exit R.H.

(*A knock is heard c.*)

SOWER. Confound the fellow, he needn't be insulting if he does speak the truth.

Enter BETSEY CHIRRUP, C.

CHIR. Mrs. Barker, Sir, wishes to know if you are alone.

SOWER. Eh ? alone ! show her in directly—

Exit CHIRRUP, C.

Mrs. Barker, charming creature. Hang it I wish I had my new wig on.

Enter MRS. BARKER, C.

MRS. B. (L.) Good morning, Mr. Sowerberry, you will I hope forgive the liberty I have taken—

SOWER. (R.) Oh, Mrs. Barker, the honour you have done me
(aside) Lucky dog, that Barker, such a charming little wife.

MRS. B. You will think it strange that I have called on you, a single gentleman, without my husband—

SOWER. On the contrary, it makes the favour a thousand times the greater. (aside) She's very pretty.

MRS. B. Mr. Barker has I believe been here this morning?

SOWER. He has. Pray take a seat.

MRS. B. No thank you. (*they sit*) He asked you to lend him some money.

SOWER. Eh? (aside) I see, she's come, thinking she can coax me out of it better than he. (*rises and walks away*) Bah! they're all alike. (aloud) Well, he did hint something of the sort, but I assure you—

MRS. B. (*rises and follows him*) My dear Mr. Sowerberry, I have come to beg, to entreat you—

SOWER. (aside) I thought so.

MRS. B. Not to let him have it.

SOWER. Eh? my dear Madam, pray be seated. (aside) She is positively charming. (*they sit*)

MRS. B. You promise me?

SOWER. Oh, Madam, to refuse so dear a friend as Mr. Barker so trifling a favour—

MRS. B. Hear me, Sir, my husband has lately taken to the dreadful habit of—

SOWER. Smoking?

MRS. B. Worse, Sir, of betting upon horse-races. Every farthing is sacrificed to this horrid passion—everything—his wife, his home neglected, you will not encourage him in it I am sure. Promise me you will not let him have this money. (*rises*)

SOWER. I swear it. How could I deny anything to a lady so—but have the kindness to sit down.

MRS. B. Thank you, Sir, I must go. If my husband suspected—

SOWER. No, do not leave me yet—let me a little longer gaze upon those beauteous features, those soft and melting eyes!

MRS. B. Sir!

SOWER. (aside) What a confounded rascal I am—my friend's wife! (aloud) Hah! Barker is a happy man—and to neglect you for a filthy horse-race. Were I the possessor of such charms—

MRS. B. Really, Mr. Sowerberry—

SOWER. Those flowing silken tresses! Oh! had I such hair!

MRS. B. (*laughing*) Well, come, you needn't complain—your own hair's very good.

SOWER. Yes, Madam, nature has been kind to me in that respect.

Enter BUTTERCUP with wig, R.H.

BUT. (R.) Here you be.

SOWER. (C. aside to him) Leave the room, you scoundrel.

MRS. B. (L.) Why what on earth is that?

BUT. This? Mr. Sowerberry's wig.

SOWER. Mine!—no such thing.

BUT. Get out with ye—'tis yours.

SOWER. 'Tis not.

BUT. It is, I tell ye.

SOWER. (*aside to him*) Will you hold your tongue?

BUT. There now, he tells me to hold my tongue—that shows it's his.

MRS. B. (*laughing*) What, Mr. Sowerberry, do you wear a wig?

SOWER. No, no.

BUT. Yes, yes. (*takes SOWERBERRY's wig off and runs round the stage, with SOWERBERRY after him*.)

Enter CHIRRUP, c., hastily.

CHIR. Oh, Sir, here's Mr. Barker coming up the garden.

MRS. B. (*to SOWERBERRY*) My husband! If he finds me here, I'm ruined.

SOWER. Go, Chirrup—say I'm out.

BUT. What, make the poor thing tell a lie—for shame of you! (*runs to C.D.*) Here, Sir, come in—Mr. Sowerberry be at home.

SOWER. The devil!

MRS. B. What's to be done?

CHIR. Here, come—this way. You can go out by the garden-gate—quick.

Exeunt L.H.D.

Re-enter BUTTERCUP with BARKER C.

BUT. (R.) The idea of saying you were out. (*aside*) Where are they gone to?

BAR. (L.) You were engaged, Sowerberry. I disturb you?

SOWER. (C.) No, not at all—I was just going out.

BAR. I won't detain you. I only called for the £50 you promised me.

SOWER. (*aside*) And I have pledged my word not to lend it. (*aloud*) My dear friend, I am truly sorry to refuse you, but on looking over my banker's book I find it is impossible. I have no money at all that I can lay my hands on just at present.

BUT. Don't you believe him—he has got money only he won't lend it.

BAR. Mr. Sowerberry, this treatment to me, Sir—

SOWER. Will you leave my sight, you rascal? My dear Barker, if I had the money I should be delighted.

BUT. Oh! if that's all, here you be. Here's his pocket-book I found this morning, with just the money, £50 inside.

SOWER. (*aside*) That infernal milkman! (*aloud*) True, I had quite forgotten that. Here. (*gives money*) (*aside*) Devil take him! (*throws pocket-book at BUTTERCUP*)

BAR. Thank you.

SOWER. Not at all. Good morning!

BAR. Good bye! (*seeing parasol which MRS. BARKER has left*) What do I see? Fire and fury!

SOWER. What's the matter?

BAR. Speak! Whose is this?

SOWER. That? Oh! that's a parasol, I think—a present I've just made my niece.

BUT. Don't you believe him. He be telling lies as fast as he can tell them.

SOW. Leave the room, Sir!

BUT. How be I to earn my three pounds a week if I leave the room? That parasol were left by a lady with a yellow bonnet on.

BAR. A yellow bonnet?

SOWER. No such thing!

BUT. Yes, and a red shawl.

BAR. Mr. Sowerberry!

SOWER. My dear friend, I will tell you everything.

BAR. No, no—not you. (*crosses to BUTTERCUP*) You speak. When was the lady here?

BUT. This minute. They were having a nice little conversation together, till you came.

BAR. Confusion! Where is she now?

BUT. Well, that I can't say.

SOWER. I breathe again!

CHIR. (*half opening L.H.D.*) The garden gate is locked, and the key in the kitchen. If I could but get it!

BUT. (*seeing door open*) Ha! there she is—in there! (*door shuts violently*)

BAR. There? So! Open the door, whoever you are, or I will break it open. (*runs to door*)

SOWER. Mr. Barker, you forget you are in my house. (*follows him*)

BAR. Your house or not, Sir, I insist on knowing who that lady is. Open the door I say.

SOWER. (*to BUTTERCUP*) Leave my house this instant.

BUT. Not exactly, you took me on a lease you know.

SOWER. Fool that I was! Mr. Barker, let me assure you—

BAR. Silence, she's coming. Now, faithless woman!

The door L.H. opens, and BETSEY CHIRRUP enters in Mrs. BARKER's bonnet and shawl—all start.

BUT. (*aside*) Lord, how she be grown.

CHIR. Good morning, Mr. Sowerberry.

SOWER. (*aside*) Chirrup, by all that's clever! I'll double that woman's wages. (*aloud*) Good bye my dear—niece.

CHIR. Good morning, my dear uncle. Excuse me, Sir, that's my parasol you're playing with. (*BARKER gives it to her*) Thank you. (*going c.*) And now to fetch the key and set my captive free by the garden gate.

Exit C.D.

BAR. What an extraordinary coincidence! Parasol, bonnet, shawl, exactly like my wife's, I could have sworn to either of them.

BUT. (*aside to him*) Here, tell ye what it is, that's not the lady that wor here just now.

BAR. No ?

BUT. (*aside to BARKER*) Lor bless ye, no, the other wasn't half her size.

SOWER. What's that infernal fellow saying now—Mr. Barker, are you satisfied ?

BAR. Quite, my dear friend, you'll pardon my folly, I am sure. (*aside to BUTTERCUP*) Meet me here in a quarter of an hour, and I'll give you a sovereign.

BUT. Eh, what for ?

BAR. For telling me the truth.

BUT. All right. I'd no idea telling the truth was so good a trade.

SOWER. Mr. Barker, when you've done conversing with my servant—

BAR. All right ! Come, say that you forgive me the idea of being jealous of so excellent a friend. Good morning ! (*aside to BUTTERCUP*) In a quarter-of-an-hour, recollect.

BUT. Yes, I'll be here.

Exit BARKER C.

SOWER. (*seizing BUTTERCUP, and bringing him forward*) Now leave my house.

BUT. Not till the seven years be up.

SOWER. Good heavens ! Leave the room, then.

BUT. Well, I don't mind doing that,—your company bean't over pleasing. Send for I when you've any more falsehoods to be rooted up. I say, I do my work pretty bobbish, don't I ?

Exit C.

SOWER. What's to be done ? Must I endure this fellow for seven years ? No, not for seven minutes ! But how to get rid of him ! And this is the man I was so proud to meet with—this is the truth I was so anxious to hear on all occasions ! What's to be done ? Ah ! a magnificent conception—a grand Satanic diabolical idea ! Oh, if I had but some instrument to work out my terrible invention ! Mrs. Chirrup!—the very woman !

Enter CHIRRUP, C.

CHIR. (L.) All is safe, Sir. I returned her parasol, shawl, bonnet, everything—let her out by the garden gate. She'd be home some minutes before her husband.

SOWER. (R.) Mrs. Chirrup, you are a genius. Look at me, don't I look diabolical ?

CHIR. Well, yes Sir, much as usual. Why ?

SOWER. Listen—I have a task for you that will eclipse all you have ever done.

CHIR. For me, Sir.

SOWER. Yes, you are the very being I require. A pretty face, a winning manner, but the cunning of a demon !—don't interrupt me. To you, I say, will I entrust the working out of my horrible design.

CHIR. Oh, Sir, you terrify me !

SOWER. I know I do, I terrify myself. Listen—you have observed this Buttercup ?

CHIR. Observed him, yes.

SOWER. He is the bane of my existence. He haunts me like a bottle imp, I cannot shake him off. His dreadful way of speaking truth will kill me—you must—you must in short cure him of that habit—make him a clever, accomplished, lying, dishonest villain like yourself.

CHIR. Really, Sir—

SOWER. Don't speak, hear me. If you do this I'll give you money—lots of money—enough to set you up in business in some nice little swindling concern.

CHIR. Oh, Sir, you're very good!

SOWER. I'm not good,—I feel I'm a perfect demon. But will you do it?

CHIR. Well, Sir, I'll try.

SOWER. Enough. Once make a liar of him, and name your own reward.

Exit L.H.D.

CHIR. Well, that's a curious task, at any rate,—to make a man tell falsehoods. It won't be difficult, I should say. I never knew a man yet, that talked five minutes with a woman without telling dozens.

Enter BUTTERCUP C.

—Good—here he comes. Now for it.

BUT. (L.) There she be. What a splendid creature she is, to be sure! It's astonishing how fond I be of that girl. How my heart always beat when I cried "Miaou" twice a day at this door! Now, if it wasn't that she's so given to falsehood and swindling, I'm blest if I wouldn't—

CHIR. (R.) Ah! my dear Mr. Buttercup!

BUT. (*aside*) Dear Mr. Buttercup! (*aloud*) Bean't dinner nearly ready, Mrs. Chirrup?

CHIR. Not yet, my dear Sir. You are hungry?

BUT. Yes, I be. Where shall I find the bread and cheese?

CHIR. Let me get you a sandwich and a glass of wine.

BUT. No, thank ye, Mrs. Chirrup. A bit of bread and cheese will do till dinner-time.

CHIR. Now do allow me, there's a dear creature!

BUT. Upon my life, Mrs. Chirrup, you be a remarkably nice young woman. Ah! it's a thousand pities you bean't a little more particular like.

CHIR. Ah! my dear Mr. Buttercup, you allude to what occurred this morning. It was wrong of me, I know. But what can I do? I must provide for a rainy day.

BUT. Yes, but you've no right to make your master pay for the umbrella.

CHIR. Ah! 'tis easy for you men to be honest; but for us poor unprotected females— Oh, if I had but any one to love me! But no, I must die as I have lived—a spinster—with none to care for me, or weep when I am gone!

BUT. Pooh!—you mustn't talk like that—a fine young woman like you.

CHIR. Oh! Mr. Buttercup, do you think me a fine woman?

BUT. Why, of course. Oh! you'll have plenty of sweethearts, never fear.

CHIR. Sweethearts? I'm sick of sweethearts. There is but one man I have ever seen who—— Excuse me, Mr. Buttercup.

BUT. (*aside*) Why, I do believe she be in love with I! Upon my life, I wish she was!

CHIR. Oh! my dear Sir, your kindness overpowers me. (*leans her head on his shoulder, crying*)

BUT. No, no—don't ye cry. Come, come. (*kisses her*) Ha! 'pon my life, that's nice.

CHIR. Oh, Mr. Buttercup! (*aside*) He's yielding!

BUT. There—don't ye be offended.

CHIR. Offended with you? Impossible!

BUT. Eh? We'll try again, then. (*kisses her*) Oh! Mrs. Chirrup if I might tell you——

CHIR. Tell me! What?

BUT. (*after a struggle*) No, no. Where did you say the bread and cheese was?

CHIR. (*aside*) Ah! I must try another tack. (*aloud*) Hark! wasn't that a whistle?

BUT. Eh? I didn't hear it.

CHIR. There again, I must go.

BUT. Go? Where?

CHIR. Oh, Sir, I know you'll not betray me—'tis a lover.

BUT. A lover? Why, I thought you said there wasn't any one you cared for?

CHIR. No, I don't care for him, but what can I do? He's an excellent young man—has a beautiful greengrocery business!

BUT. Damn his greengrocery business!

CHIR. And he has offered me marriage.

BUT. He? Never! I offer you marriage. (*kneels*)

CHIR. You? Oh no!

BUT. Why not?

CHIR. Oh no! You are too simple, too innocent, too honest—my husband must be crafty, cunning.

BUT. I'll be cunning—I'll be crafty.

CHIR. Must flatter.

BUT. I'll flatter.

CHIR. Must not be too particular about the truth.

BUT. I won't be particular—that is—what am I at? Tell me, why do you object to a husband that speaks the truth?

CHIR. Why! Oh, Sir, you tell me now I'm beautiful.

BUT. Well, there's no lie about that.

CHIR. But when I grow old and ugly, think you I could endure a husband who told me I was so?

BUT. I wouldn't tell ye.

CHIR. Then you'd no longer speak the truth.

BUT. Deuce take it, no.

CHIR. And after all, what is a little falsehood, when it does harm to no one—when, on the contrary, it makes people happy ?

BUT. You're right, what is it—that is—no, no. Where did you say the bread and cheese was kept?

CHIR. Come, I will show you.

BUT. No, let me go alone. If you come, I shall—

CHIR. That poor greengrocer!

BUT. Damn the greengrocer! Come. Oh lord, oh lord!

Exeunt c.

Enter SOWERBERRY R.H.D.

BOY. (*crosses window with a note, and knocks at door*)

SOWER. I cannot rest until I know how my infamous project thrives. Why am I not the hero of a melodrame? I feel I ought never to enter a room without blue fire and mysterious music. And I, that railed at falsehood so! Ha, ha, ha! My very laugh reminds me of O. Smith.

Enter CHIRRUP C.

—Say, Mrs. Chirrup, what success?

CHIR. (L.) Success indeed! The fellow's as obstinate as a mule. But here's a note from Mrs. Barker.

SOWER. (R.) From Mrs. Barker? Charming creature! Eh? (*reads*) "We are lost." Lost! Who's lost?—what's lost? "My husband insists on my accompanying him to your house. He has bribed your servant"—Eh? Oh, that infernal Buttercup!—"bribed your servant to tell him whether 'twas I who was concealed in your house this morning." Good heavens! "Postscript.—Save me—save yourself! My husband is now loading his pistols."

CHIR. You'll be murdered.

SOWER. I shall—a martyr to the truth. And you can't get this idiot—

CHIR. To tell a falsehood, Sir—impossible!

SOWER. What's to be done? Oh! here he is. If I could but get him out of the way!

Enter BUTTERCUP C., eating a large piece of bread and cheese.

SOWER. Ha, my dear friend! Having your lunch, I see. That's right!

BUT. Yes—just a little mouthful till dinner's ready.

SOWER. (*aside*) I wish it would choke him! (*aloud*) My excellent friend, will you go a short errand for me?

BUT. I can't just now, I've got to meet that gent as was here this morning.

SOWER. (*aside*) He doesn't even disguise it. (*aloud*) Never mind him.

KNOCK heard, c.

BUT. I never break my word.

CHIR. (*at window*) Sir, Sir, they're here.

SOWER. Who?

CHIR. Mr. and Mrs. Barker.

SOWER. Don't let them in.

BUT. Not let 'em in? How can I keep my promise and meet the man if you don't? Here, I'll let them in.

SOWER. Stop, fellow!

BUT. Be off with ye!

Runs out, c.

CHIR. It's all over with you, Sir.

Re-enter BUTTERCUP, with MR. and MRS. BARKER, c.

BAR. Mr. Sowerberry, you deceived me this morning, but now, Sir, I *will* know the truth.

SOWER. Mr. Barker! (*goes up R. and sits at table*)

BAR. Enough Sir. Now, my fine fellow, just come here.

MRS. B. (L.) You will not take that man's word in preference to mine?

BAR. (L.C.) Silence, Madam.

SOWER. (*aside*) And he has loaded pistols in his pocket!

BAR. Now then, my friend, look at this lady.

BUT. Yes, I see her, there bean't much of her.

CHIR. (*aside to SOWERBERRY*) Whistle, Sir.

SOWER. (*aside to her*) Whistle? What for?

BAR. Well, and she is—

CHIR. (*aside to SOWERBERRY*) Whistle, for mercy's-sake!

SOWER. (*whistles*)

BUT. Oh lord!—there's that infernal greengrocer again!

CHIR. (*aside to BUTTERCUP*) If you expose that lady, I'll marry him to-morrow.

BUT. To-morrow? No, you wouldn't?

BAR. Well, Sir, this lady is the one you saw this morning in this use. Am I not right?

BUT. Why, the fact is—

CHIR. (*aside to SOWERBERRY*) Whistle again.

SOWER. (*whistles*)

BUT. (*aside*) Confound him! (*aloud*) Eh? No, that bean't the lady.

BAR. No?

BUT. No—the one I saw was as tall as this, and as broad as this. (*in action*)

BAR. You deceived me, then, this morning?

BUT. Yes, yes. She's not a bit like t'other one.

SOWER. (*aside*) How beautifully he does it, now he's once begun!

BAR. Sowerberry, I ask your pardon. Mrs. B., my dear, forgive me. (*they embrace*) As to you, Sir—

BUT. 'Twasn't me—indeed it wasn't.

SOWER. (*aside*) It wasn't he! Good!—that makes two!

BUT. (*to CHIRRUP*) There, now, be you satisfied?

CHIR. Quite. (*gives her hand*) Go on as you've begun, and you'll be perfect.

20 A PHENOMENON IN A SMOCK FROCK.

BUT. No, shall I ? What ! be lies better than the truth ?

SOWER. Certainly not. Truth is the broad straight line of railway upon which the engine of Society must run. Innocent flattery and pleasant fiction serve as oil to make the wheels run easy. Without the first, we should be driven nobody knows where : without the second, the hard iron, truth, would shake Society all to pieces.

BUT. Mayhap you be right ; I don't understand you, though.—Come, Mrs. Chirrup.

SOWER. Stop. Before you go, just say a word for us here ; they'll believe what you say, you know.

BUT. Eh ? Very good. (*to AUDIENCE*) Here ; I be to speak to you about this little play. Well, how about it ? For my own part I think it is about the worst piece I ever see, and so I told the chap as writ it, but he thinks himself so damn clever—

SOWER. Eh ? That won't do. He'll ruin everything.

CHIR. Whistle, Sir.

SOWER. (*whistles*)

BUT. Ugh!—he's there again ! (*looks round*) What be I to say ? That it's good ? (*all nod*) Oh, very well ! (*to AUDIENCE*) Now, I assure you this little piece is the finest ever written—the acting first-rate—and altogether—

SOWER. Lord, what crammers he does tell !

BUT. Well, what be I to say ? Here, I sha'n't say nothing more about it—I'll leave it to these gentlefolks here. They'll tell you the truth, never fear. Now, Ladies and Gentlemen, tell us the truth—don't be frightened—if you like us, say so ; and if you don't, why, just imitate our example, and give us a little innocent flattery.

SOWERBERRY. CHIRRUP. BUTTERCUP. MRS. BARKER. BARKER.

R.

L.

Curtain.