

I'LL WRITE TO THE “TIMES.”

A Farce,

IN ONE ACT.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

“*Founded on Facts,*” “*A Man without a Head,*” “*Allow me to Apologize,*” “*Love in Livery,*” &c.

THOMAS HAILES LACY,

WELLINGTON STREET, STRAND,

LONDON.

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I'LL WRITE TO THE "TIMES."

*First Performed at the Theatre Royal Sadler's Wells,
on Thursday, October 16th, 1856.*

Characters.

THE HON. HENRY HUNTLEY ...	MR. BELFORD.
SIR HARRY HARFORD, BART. ...	MR. HAYWELL.
MR. PUNCTILIO BLOCK	MR. J. W. RAY.
SERVANT	MR. MORRIS.
CABMAN	MR. MOORE.
THE HON. MRS. HUNTLEY.....	MISS CAROLINE PARKE
MARIA BLAND.....	MISS JENNY MARSTON.

Costumes.

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I'LL WRITE TO THE "TIMES."

SCENE I.—*Near the York and Albany.*

Enter the Hon. HENRY HUNTINGTON, and SIR HARRY HARFORD, arm in arm, R.

HUNT. Pshaw, man, give the girl up.

SIR H. It's very well for you married men to preach philosophy and self denial, but there's a monstrous difference of opinion with those who are not so.

HUNT. Quite true, my dear fellow, but I don't see why I should suffer my dearest friend to fall into a melancholy—perhaps into a consumption without an effort to save him.

SIR H. That cursed ball at Lady Carr's was my ruin, would to heaven I had never seen her.

HUNT. Amen to that sweet prayer, but why have you allowed yourself to see her so often since?

SIR H. Simply, my dear Huntley, to save myself the inconvenience of cutting my throat.

HUNT. Hem, I don't think the lady exhibits an over due amount of propriety, in meeting you so often and clandestinely in the park.

SIR H. For virtue's sake, Huntley, don't breathe a word against her, my entreaties long and vainly urged, alone won her to the step, she has told me who and what she is, an orphan and a gentlewoman, but has positively refused to give me her address or let me be introduced to her house, in consequence of the extraordinary eccentricities and vulgarity of her uncle, she will be of age soon, and then of course, her own mistress and my wife.

HUNT. Well, it's rather an extraordinary proceeding on her part.

SIR H. Huntley, you and I shall certainly quarrel if you break one slight upon her. I tell you she is perfect, such beauty, such grace, sir, the stoutest Mahometan would forswear all the hours in paradise for her sake.

HUNT. Upon my word, you are very warm.

SIR H. Cold, sir, cold as an icicle to what a man should be who speaks of her, she is all that eye or heart could desire, she is—

HUNT. Pray break off these raptures, and tell me of what breed is the extraordinary animal who is sailing this way.

SIR H. Some escaped lunatic by his appearance and excitement.

HUNT. Take care then, for he is upon us.

Enter MR. PUNCTILIO BLOCK, L. 2 E. watch in hand and in a high state of irritation.

BLOCK. To the time to a second, and that omnibus not in sight, this won't do, these omnibus people, mustn't be allowed to trifling with the public in this reckless manner, I certainly shall have to write to the "Times" about it—what are those two fellows staring at? They look as if they'd got watches, or I should suspect they had an eye to mine. Good morning, gents, both, how d'ye do? can you tell me what o'clock it is?

HUNT. Sir, it's just eleven by mine.

BLOCK. (*crosses to c.*) Then allow me to tell you your watch isn't worth a rap, it is now two minutes and seventeen seconds after eleven—and what that ruffian who drives the Camberwell 'bus means—I should like to know—but I have the satisfaction of knowing that such a scoundrel must be eventually transported.

(*crosses R.*)

HUNT. Pray, may I enquire his offence, sir.

BLOCK. Offence, sir, it should be made felony, I expect a lady by a 'bus which should have been here by eleven—and now it's (*looking at watch*) hilloa! it's five minutes past. I'll write to the "Times" a miscreant—a—

HUNT. Indeed, sir, so trifling an irregularity hardly deserves so severe a handling.

BLOCK. Trifling, sir, to be—damn it—six minutes after his time, any man who could do it would pick a pocket, sir, very likely cut a throat, the man who does it is a social outlaw, and ought to be hanged, sir, and those who call such conduct trifling ought to be hanged with him; but I'll write to the —; ha! here it comes, seven minutes, six seconds and a half after his time. I darn't trust myself with that man, (*shouting*) Maria, Maria!

SIR H. (*to HUNTER, savagely*) I could sweep this fellow from the face of the earth for polluting that name with his vile lips.

BLOCK. Maria!

Enter MARIA, R.

MARIA. My dear, sir, pray do not call so loudly.

BLOCK. Look here, Miss, eight minutes and a half I have waited—I who was never half a minute after time, and wouldn't wait as long for the Grand Turk.

HUNT. I say, Harford, that's a devilish pretty girl.

SIR H. (*carelessly*) Is she; what do I care? ha! by all that's good, it is my Maria. (*MARIA makes signs to him not to notice her*)

BLOCK. (*turning sharply round to HUNTER*) Who's a devilish pretty girl, sir, and whoever is—what is it to you?

HUNT. Surely, sir, there is no offence in expressing one's admiration of a pretty woman

BLOCK. Isn't there, sir, but if a pack of people parade the streets for the purpose of telling women they are pretty, perhaps there's no offence in my expressing my opinion of it, which I shall certainly do in a letter to the Times; as for you Miss, I've wasted too much time about you already; ah! it's lucky, there's a cab!—here, cab.

MARIA. Pray, sir, remember, we are in the public streets; (*aside*) what can Harford think—I am ready to die with shame and vexation.

SIR H. (*aside to HUNTLEY*) This must be her old fool of an uncle.
BLOCK. Cab!

Enter CABMAN.

Now, Mr. Cab, I want you to take this young lady to Park Cottages.

SIR H. (*aside*) Ha!

BLOCK. That is exactly a mile and a quarter, what time will you undertake to do it in?

CABMAN. In about twenty minutes, sir.

BLOCK. About twenty minutes, you rascal, what do you mean by about twenty minutes, will you undertake to do it in twenty minutes?

CABMAN. Well, yes, sir.

BLOCK. Very good, Maria, if this man takes you in twenty minutes, give him a shilling, if not, nothing; now it's no use your talking, my fine fellow, if I have any of your impertinence, I shall write to the "Times."

MARIA. Will you not accompany me, sir?

BLOCK. No, Miss, I shall not, I have sacrificed time enough as it is. Go. I shall be home punctually at five minutes to two.

MARIA *bids SIR HARRY HARFORD good bye in dumb show, and Exit,*
r. 2 E. with CABMAN.

SIR H. (*to HUNTLEY*) I shall follow, and endeavour to get an interview before the old chap returns, do something to detain him if you can, and wait here for me.

Exit, r. 2 E.

HUNT. You seem to have an excellent watch there, sir.

BLOCK. (*thrusting it into pocket*) I dare say it is; (*aside*) there's a suspicious look about this fellow, and I don't see a policeman about—nobody ever does—I shall certainly write to the "Times" about it.

HUNTLEY. You will excuse my familiarity, sir, in addressing you, but you seem to be a man of no ordinary capacity and penetration.

BLOCK. I, sir, am a man of punctuality and decision, and a corrector of abuses, sir, as I think my correspondence with the leading journal will sufficiently prove.

HUNT. (*aside*) It's Paterfamilias himself, I shouldn't wonder. (*aloud*) May I ask what topics you have touched upon in that journal, sir?

BLOCK. I have devoted a large portion of my time, sir, to organ grinders, who though they are the victims of a few scoundrels are themselves merciless tormentors of the public at large;—I have also directed my attention to perambulators, double and single—in fact, sir, I have written to the "Times" on every subject of annoyance; they have not hitherto published my letters, but I have the best authority for stating that they very shortly intend devoting the whole of one impression to my letters alone, and that reminds me,

I'll write and ask them when they're going to do it. (*takes out note book and writes*)

HUNT. (*aside*) The man's an imbecile, if not quite insane; at all hazards Harford shall not connect himself with such a family—the disease may be hereditary: Miss Maria may be mad herself, that would account for her meeting him in the park so often.

BLOCK. Well, I suppose you're as tired of my company as I am of yours; so as I have somewhat longish letter to write the—

HUNT. Your pardon, sir, for five minutes, I feel it my duty to unburthen myself of a matter which closely affects yourself and family.

BLOCK. Family, sir? I wasn't aware that I had one.

HUNT. At all events you have a niece.

BLOCK. I have, sir, who torments me to death: she has no idea of punctuality, she never had, sir, she didn't even come into the world for a day and a half after she was expected.

HUNT. Well, sir, I have reason to believe, to know that she is the object of attention to a certain gentleman, whom it would be perdition to encourage.

BLOCK. Maria! pooh, sir, Why I only bought her a doll the other day.

HUNT. Possibly so, sir, she is tired of that plaything, and has contrived to get another.

BLOCK. Who is the scoundrel, tell me, I'll publish his name in the "Times," and who are you, sir, and what's your authority for this assertion?

HUNT. You must pardon my replying to either of these questions, sir, I have warned you, if you neglect my warning, blame yourself, the only good I know of him is, that he is not a ticket-of-leave convict.

BLOCK. I've written about them.

HUNT. He is a spendthrift.

BLOCK. He is a booby.

HUNT. A sharper.

BLOCK. Ill expose him in the "Times."

HUNT. A card player.

BLOCK. You can't say anything worse than that of him.

HUNT. I can, sir, (*aside*) I'll clinch it now, (*aloud*) and he's a married man.

BLOCK. Good gracious! but what a splendid letter—a long letter.

HUNT. So, sir, be on your guard. (*aside*) The devil! if that isn't my wife's bonnet yonder, I'm an Egyptian! Servant, sir, look after your niece, and curse the "Times." *Exit, l. 1 e.*

BLOCK. Hilloa! I say young man—curse the "Times" I havn't much opinion of him—all questionable characters say the same thing—but Maria—and the married gambler!

Enter the HONOURABLE MRS. HUNTERY, l. 2 e.

MRS. H. (*aside*) perfidious man! I have watched him to some purpose this time—this old man was with the girl—at all risks I'll question him—(*aloud*) Sir—I—

BLOCK. Upon my word—my good lady—I'm pressed for time just now and—

MRS. H. Mr. Block.

BLOCK. Miss Martindale.

MRS. H. Alas! no, sir—I wish I were—I am married—

BLOCK. Ah! I never saw the marriage in the "Times." Who is he pray?

MRS. H. To the basest—most ungrateful and perfidious monster on earth.

BLOCK. You made rather a queer selection, ma'am.

MRS. H. He was very different when I married him, sir—am I frightfully ugly?

BLOCK. 'Pon my word—I am no judge of ladies' faces—so I—can't pretend to say. But I tell you what, my dear! you know best. No other woman has had the impertinence to speak to me this morning but Maria, except yourself.

MRS. H. Well, sir—then I'm *not*—and you know it—but would you believe it! he abandons me to run after other women—I *know* it—I never detected him—never tried to—till this morning—when I was determined to confirm my too just suspicions—I followed him and a wretch he calls his friend—they stopped here—they waited evidently for some one—an omnibus arrived—

BLOCK. After its time I'll be bound.

MRS. H. A lady alighted—

BLOCK. An inevitable occurrence whenever an omnibus stops.

MRS. H. She came up and spoke to you.

BLOCK. Hilloa!

MRS. H. And on her quitting you, my perfidious traitor dispatched his jackal—oh, that man—to track her—I have no doubt to find out where they lived—I saw it all—now, sir—for old friendship's sake, sir—for the memory of the time, when you knew me as a child—tell me—who that woman is! why—my dear Miss—Mrs. that was my precious niece Maria.

MRS. H. Why! my little school-fellow Maria Bland! (*aside*) To be slighted for a little puss like that. Oh, Patience but I will be revenged. (*aloud*) Dear, dear Maria! but surely there must be a mistake here.

BLOCK. Well I don't know ma'am, but I'm inclined to think *not*. I know there *is* a fellow after her—and he *is* a married man.

MRS. H. Oh!

BLOCK. A spendthrift!—

MRS. H. Of his wife's affections only—

BLOCK. A sharper!

MRS. H. That is false sir!

BLOCK. And I think I heard, a ticket-of-leave convict.

MRS. H. Sir, you are insulting me in my distress—that *is* too monstrous.

BLOCK. Well—I only heard so—I tell you.

HUNTER (peeping in from behind R. U. E.)

HUNT. What the devil can they be talking about so long.

HUNT. (*aside*) "My dear"—well upon my soul—(*retires*)

BLOCK. Leave it all to me—I'll prepare a detailed statement of the facts and send it to the "Times."

MRS. H. Sir, I must go—and see my darling Maria—do give me your address.

BLOCK. Hem! she's not much worth seeing—but however you can do as you please—there (*gives card*)—but never mind the other nonsense leave it to me—I must say good bye now, my dear.

HUNTLEY (*peeps in*).

MRS. H. I am equally pressed—good bye—dear—dear Mr. Block.

Exit, R. 2 E.

BLOCK. Well this seems a pretty little misunderstanding at present—Maria and a married man, Mr. Block and a married woman—married man wants the address of Mr. Blo—no—Maria wants the address of married—no that's not it—never mind. I'll go to the club and there clearly and lucidly arrange the entire affair—for hang me if I don't send a full, true, and particular account of the whole transaction to the "Times." (*looks at watch*) Bless my heart, it's twelve o'clock, as I'm a special correspondent.

Exit R.

HUNT. (*coming forward*) "Dear, dear Mr. Block!"—that's what my wife said—"Dear Mr. Block!" Damn Mr. Block! Block—Block! I've heard the ugly rascal's name somewhere. So, Mrs. Huntley, with your modest looks and gentle manners, you can carry on an intrigue with an old ruffian of the name of Block, can you? Meet him in the sunlight—in the open streets!—upon my word I would not have believed that women were such shameful hypocrites! I'm very glad I've spoilt Harford's game, for, at all events, I shall save him from the trap I have been ass enough to fall into myself.

Re-enter SIR HARRY, R. 2 E.

Well, Harry, back again?

SIR H. I found the house, and followed her in: she was mightily offended at my want of attention to her requests—her entreaties; begged me to leave, if I loved her—at last commanded me to leave, if I ever hoped to see her again. In vain I said, "My dear Miss Bland, hear me one word—"

HUNT. Stop—Bland, Bland—what a fool I have been! her father was an officer—married this Block's sister.

SIR H. Well?

HUNT. I knew him well, and your Maria too when a little girl of ten years old. I've had her on my knee—

SIR H. What, sir? Oh, as a child. But, my dear Huntley, this is famous news!—you are a privileged visitor; if you ever valued my friendship, go at once and plead my cause.

HUNT. (*aside*) I'm just the man to do it, I fancy. Ah! an idea! entrance to the house will enable me to detect my wife—I saw him give her his card. But how to dispose of Harford, after slandering him as I have done?

SIR H. Do you hesitate, Huntley?

HUNT. My dear fellow, I was only considering how far I should be justified in assisting your views in such a business; it might lead to matrimony.

SIR H. What in the name of heaven else should it lead to? and surely you cannot complain of the state, you have so lovely, accomplished, and virtuous a wife.

HUNT. (*aside*) Oh, the devil! (*aloud*) Come along, my dear fellow, I'll get you a wife if I can, and avoid hating me for it for the rest of your life, if you can.

Exeunt, r. 2 e.

SCENE II.—*Drawing Room of Mr. Block's Cottage—open door at back leading into a garden.*

Enter MARIA from garden.

MARIA. I never felt so humiliated in my life: to be a party to such a scene of vulgarity with my uncle, and worse than all for Harford to have witnessed it. I shall not dare to go out again for a month—and then for him to follow me home—he'll come again—I know it—and all my care to prevent his knowing my uncle be frustrated for ever—ha! (*retires up*)

ENTER BLOCK with a sheet of paper and watch in hand.

BLOCK. Five minutes to two to a second—I've got it here all pat (*reads*) To the editor of the "Times"—"sir, taking advantage of your known readiness to assist in the exposure of abuse and suppression of vice in every shape, I herewith send you a detailed account of a piece of the most infamous and elaborate profligacy—a scandalous outrage, perhaps unparalleled in the annals of crime." That's very strongly put I think—"I was this morning—Mr. Editor—" (*sees MARIA*) Hillock Miss are you here?

MARIA. Is there anything so very singular in this?

BLOCK. I should have thought you would have locked yourself in your bed-room for a month at least.

MARIA. For what offence, sir?

BLOCK. Are you aware, Miss, that you stand in the presence of an outraged uncle?

MARIA. I am not indeed, sir!

BLOCK. Oh, you're not, now the acuteness I have necessarily acquired by my continued and laborious correspondence with Printing House Square, has enabled me to discover—

MARIA. What?

BLOCK. A piece of frightful depravity on one side—but that's not yours; and a piece of diabolical deception on the other—and that is yours.

MARIA. (*aside*) Gracious! can he have heard of Harford's visit?

BLOCK. You've taken it into that curled and corrupt head of yours, miss, to fall in love—now it's no use denying it.

MARIA. I have no intention of denying it, uncle, it is true that I

have listened to the overtures of a gentleman, in every way worthy to be heard, perhaps wrongfully in concealing it from you, but as you have never in any way encouraged my confidence, I feel myself less blameworthy in having withheld it.

BLOCK. (*aside*) Very neatly expressed indeed. She must have been overhauling my letters to the "Times." I now, sir, however ask your forgiveness, and—

BLOCK. Stop a minute, young person, are you aware of the character of this gentleman who's so worthy to be listened to?

MARIA. I believe it to be irreproachable, sir—

BLOCK. Oh—he has never mentioned to you in any of his confidential interviews that he's a blackleg.

MARIA. Uncle!

BLOCK. And a swindler and has been transported, I think, for horse-stealing.

MARIA. Sir, you are uttering the most atrocious calumnies.

BLOCK. and I dare be sworn he has never confided to you the fact of his being a married man.

MARIA. Good heaven what horrid mockery is this!

BLOCK. It's all true, Miss, every word, as I have demonstrated in my letter to the—

MARIA. But, uncle, for mercy's sake,—tell me when and from whom you learnt this terrible news; for the first part of your story—it is too ridiculous—but married! oh no, no; from whom did you hear it.

BLOCK. From a very intimate friend of his whom I met this morning. (*MARIA sinks into a chair*) But mind me, no more of this, or I'll read you a lesson, Miss, I warrant you, if your own little amount of sense doesn't teach you how to proceed; as for me, I must go and shut myself up for a time to arrange some correspondence, for I met this morning a very intelligent young man, who had heard how actively I was employed in communicating with the leading journal, and who offered himself as my secretary, I engaged him, he'll be here to day, and when I have him to write as I dictate, I'll save the "Times" all expense, by furnishing the entire matter myself

Exit R.

MARIA. If this should be true! Harford married, I will not, must not believe it.

Enter SERVANT, L.

SERVANT. The Honourable Mr. Huntley, Miss.

MARIA. You had better inform your master.

SERNANT. He desired me to say he wished to see you Miss.

MARIA. I know of no one of the name, but admit him.

Exit SERVANT, L.

Who can this be, I wonder?

Enter HUNTLEY, L.

HUNT. A thousand pardons, Miss Bland, for this intrusion, but when I announce myself as an old friend of your fathers, and of

your own, when not quite so much of a woman as now, I trust you will forgive me.

MARIA. Forgive you, sir, I am but too happy to see you; I think I do remember something of you now, but it is long ago.

HUNT. Only the time necessary to transform a pretty child into a beautiful woman.

MARIA. You have more need to ask my forgiveness now, Mr. Huntley; I am quite unused to such compliments, and neither deserve nor desire them.

HUNT. (*aside*) Sensible girl; but my wife was just the same once—it's all a sham, a snare, and a delusion.

MARIA. But, sir, presuming on the familiarity of an old acquaintance, and remembering to have heard your name recently from an acquaintance, may I ask if you have met in society, with a gentleman of the name of Harford.

HUNT. (*aside*) Here's diffidence with a vengeance; all women are alike (*aloud*) Well, Miss Bland, I have, certainly, that is occasionally, he's a man whom I'm not anxious to be on intimate terms with; he's a little flighty, inconstant, and has several such minor failings.

MARIA. But what can his wife think of these failings?

HUNT. (*aside*) Wife—Old Block's been here. (*aloud*) Wife, Miss Bland, pardon me, that is a subject he himself never alludes to, and which, therefore, I am not justified in enlarging upon.

MARIA. (*aside*) Alas! it is all true! Perfidious man! I can hate him now as much as ever I could have loved him.

HUNT. (*aside*) I think I have saved the poor devil of a fellow now; (*aloud*) my time is short, Miss Bland, therefore, allow me to pass at once to my object, and though I fear I may shock the delicate feelings, I am sure my old friend's daughter possesses, still my duty both to him and yourself compels me to speak.

MARIA. I attend, sir.

HUNT. You live here, Miss Bland, under the protection of an uncle.

MARIA. I do, sir.

HUNT. Who bears the reputation of a moral and respectable man.

MARIA. Assuredly, sir, passing a few eccentricities, a worthier man does not live.

HUNT. Alas! Miss, you are very credulous, and he is very cunning.

MARIA. Will you please to speak plainly, sir?

HUNT. Undoubtedly, this very worthy, moral, and respectable uncle of yours, is at this moment carrying on an abominable intrigue with a lady of my acquaintance.

MARIA. Impossible!

HUNT. Fact; I myself saw them this morning in close conversation, in rather a retired spot near the Regent's Park.

MARIA. This is most astounding!

HUNT. I have now discharged my duty. Miss Bland, of course you own good sense, and feeling of propriety, will suggest to you what use you should make of my information. I shall take the liberty of waiting upon you again.

MARIA. At any time, I shall be most happy.

HUNT. Good morning, Miss Bland.

MARIA. Good morning, sir.

HUNT. By-the-bye, if you'll allow me, I'll step through the garden, and out by the gate.

MARIA. Certainly, sir. Good morning.

HUNT. (aside) I noticed a snug little shrubbery there, where I can lie *perdu*, and watch the gate to see if my precious wife should make her appearance.

Exit, c.

MARIA. My uncle contracting an intimacy with a lady! it is barely within the bounds of belief, and very far beyond its bounds to imagine that any lady would contract an intimacy with him.

Re-enter BLOCK, r., with an immense basket of papers.

BLOCK. There, I think that'll be enough for him to copy out to-day. What! you here still, Miss—in this open room? Confound it; I tell you I won't have it, that married blackleg 'll be walking in through the garden. Go away, Miss; shut yourself up, and be ashamed of yourself, as far as you can.

MARIA. What have I to be ashamed of, uncle.

BLOCK. Having more important business off my mind, I have a good mind to give you a severe lecture, but the crushing eloquence which I have acquired would perhaps be too much for you; so leave the room.

MARIA. Which you possibly want to receive another lady in; oh! uncle, uncle! I'm shocked at you!

BLOCK. What are you talking about now, Miss.

MARIA. Oh, uncle! I could not have believed it of you, I've heard all about it.

BLOCK. That's lucky, as I haven't, perhaps you'll tell me what it is?

MARIA. At your time of life too!

BLOCK. For the last time, you young hussey, will you tell me what you're driving at?

MARIA. You censure me, uncle, for falling honourably in love, whilst you, at the same time are carrying on a clandestine correspondence with a lady yourself.

BLOCK. Why you impudent young —

MARIA. Now don't pretend to deny it, uncle, I have heard it all, and that you met her near the park this morning.

BLOCK. If I did I'm — Stop, yes, I did meet a lady, or rather a lady met me; dear me, my arduous work on that paper drives everything out of my head; I did meet a Mrs.— Mrs—

MARIA. What uncle! a married woman, too, oh, for shame, for shame! this shocking outrage upon decency is beyond belief, sir. I say, sir, is beyond belief as it is beyond endurance.

BLOCK. (astonished) Mem for the "Times," violent assault by a niece upon her uncle. Leave the room, Miss, and don't dare sully the purity of —

MARIA. Purity, oh, shocking! oh! you naughty old man.

BLOCK. Get out, Miss, this moment or—(*drives her off R.*) an

impudent young slut. I the unflinching champion of morality, I seduce a married woman! or any woman! but I must be calm; affairs of deeper moment are on hand, the muffin bells and the Ethiopian Serenaders, must receive immediate attention.

Enter HUNTLEY, c., from Garden.

HUNT. (*aside*) It's no use watching, and that infernal gate's locked, so I must go through this way.

BLOCK. Hilloa, sir, what business have you in my pleasure grounds; I shall take the liberty of reporting this unwarrantable conduct to the "Times," sir—

HUNT. I came merely to make a call upon Miss Bland, sir.

BLOCK. Oh, you did, did you? Then, pray, sir, is there any other person who visits her, or are you the swindler convict, and married man, who is after her?

HUNT. I confess, Mr. Block, that I am a married man.

BLOCK. That'll do, sir; I can imagine all the rest, sir; do me the favour, sir, to get out.

HUNT. Not until I have received ample satisfaction, or inflicted summary chastisement upon you, sir.

BLOCK. Satisfaction, sir; chastisement—what for, sir—confound you?

HUNT. For a diabolical attempt to rob me of my wife, sir; confound you!

BLOCK. Sir, do you want to be shown up in the "Times," because you're going the right way to work if you do?

HUNT. You were seen in private conversation with her this morning.

BLOCK. What, are you that injured lady's husband, sir?

HUNT. I am the injured husband of that perfidious woman!

BLOCK. Then how dare you come here, sir, after my niece?

HUNT. What do I want with your niece?

BLOCK. That's what I want to know; and how dare you come to me—to me—who have been on terms of intimacy with your wife for —

HUNT. Oh! you confess it at last do you; but you shall dearly repent this; pray how long have you been her "dear Mr. Block."

BLOCK. Not so long, as according to her statement, you have been the basest, vilest, meanest, cruelest, worst of husbands.

HUNT. It is false, sir; she never so called me?

BLOCK. She was right. What right have you to come here to rob me of my niece?

HUNT. What do I want with your niece? What right have you to attempt to rob me of my wife?

BLOCK. What do I want with your wife? I never asked for her. I don't want anybody's wife; go and fetch her, and we'll soon clear all this up.

HUNT. I will, sir, depend upon it, you shall not escape me.

(*Going L.*)

BLOCK. And stop, sir, perhaps you'll be good enough to leave

your name, in case I should consider it necessary to trouble the "Times" with a note in this matter.

HUNT. (*aside*) In order to prevent any mistake about my really being after his niece, for a few minutes, I'll take Harford's name. (*aloud*) My name, sir, is Harford, sir—Harford.

BLOCK. Very well, Mr. Harford, then go and produce this much-injured lady.

HUNT. Don't insult me, sir, with her injuries; I only hope, for your own sake, you're a good shot, that's all. *Exit, L.*

BLOCK. Shot!—what an incitement to a breach of the peace! The "Times" shall hear of that. I never was so bullied or bothered in my life. Here! Maria!—I believe that slut's at the bottom of it all.

Enter MARIA, R.

Come here, Miss. Do you know any one of the name of Harford?

MARIA. I do, sir; he is the gentleman—

BLOCK. Who's fallen in love with that impudent face of yours, eh?—he's a pretty fellow!—why the scamp has been here, and dared to insinuate that I have been tampering with his wife,

MARIA. (*aside*) Mercy!—Harford's wife! (*aloud*) then you ought to be horsewhipped, sir, there.

BLOCK. Horsewhipped!—oh, damn it! But do you pretend to believe this, Miss?

MARIA. Of course I do, sir; I knew you had—didn't I tell you so?

BLOCK. Patience, patience!—but this is a conspiracy brought home to a man's home and hearthstone. I shall take the opinion of the "Times" upon the subject; I shall ask for a special leader on the subject. Not another word, miss—I shall now go and order twenty reams of paper. Oh, if my secretary would only come—we shall have to sit up all night.

Exit, L.

MARIA. So, Harford is really married! false—base—heartless—I could—oh! there's no faith left in mankind. He married, and my uncle intriguing with his wife of all women in the world! I think I'll go into a nunnery.

Enter SERVANT, L.

SERVANT. A lady, Miss.

MARIA. Has she no name?

SERVANT. She gave none, Miss.

MARIA. Let her come in.

Exit, SERVANT, L.

Who can this be, I should like to know?

Enter MRS. HUNTERY, L.

What! Kate—my dear Kate?

MRS. H. Dear Maria. (*aside*) I should like to box your ears well.

MARIA. Why, I havn't seen you since you left school: I am so glad you're come, for I am so wretched, dear, you can't think.

MRS. H. Are you, dear? (*aside*) Serve you right, you little flirt.

MARIA. Only think, love, a dear, noble—no, a nasty, good-for-nothing fellow made me believe he was over head and ears in love with me, and offered to marry me; pressed me ever so many times to run away with me.

MRS. H. (*aside*) the wretch.

MARIA. And, after all, he turned out to be (*sobbing*) to be—a married man! shameful, wicked Harry.

MRS. H. (*aside*) she calls him Harry too, oh! I can't stand this, any longer; (*aloud*) you are aware, I am married, Miss Bland.

MARIA. I heard so, but did not know to whom; but, why this altered tone?

MRS. H. Oh! I dare say, and you, mean to tell me; you horrid wicked creature, that you didn't know Harry, as you call him—was my husband.

MARIA. Gracious? your husband! my Harry.

MRS. H. No, Miss—not your Harry, my Harry; perhaps you can oblige me with his other name?

MARIA. I will never mention it again, all I can say is, it begins (*sobbing*) with, with, an H.

MRS. H. Of course, you know it well enough; it was all your own fault, I know, you led him on with your little—stupid, demure, artful ways; you know you did.

MARIA. Oh, don't be angry with me, indeed, I did not know it; we are both very wretched.

MRS. H. We are both very wretched? I admire that. You compare your wretchedness with mine? you a little foolish puss, who has taken a passing fancy to a handsome man, and I a miserable wife; disgraced, and abandoned. Ugh, you deceitful little minx.

MARIA. Madam! I have told you my fault was involuntary, but I cannot submit to this language in my own house.

MRS. H. Oh! you will order me out, I suppose; perhaps you expect "your Harry." Oh! you little viper!

MARIA. Do not think, madam, that I shall endure this insolence any longer without a retaliation, which I would have spared you; it certainly well becomes you, to taunt me with an unconscious error, when you yourself, a married woman, are carrying on a shameful intrigue with another man!

MRS. H. I, you saucy little story teller, and with whom pray? if you have invented the person as well as the fib—

MARIA. I am ashamed to say, with my own uncle.

MRS. H. Ha, ha, ha!—why you good-for-nothing—how dare you insinuate such an absurdity?

MARIA. Insinuate it you wicked woman—on the authority of your husband himself.

MRS. H. He did not dare to—

MARIA. He did, he did, he did, and you're a base woman, I blush for you.

MRS. H. You'd much better blush for yourself Miss —you've most cause.

MARIA. You were seen whispering together to-day, in the street.

MRS. H. I was telling him, that a foolish little girl, had seduced my husband.

MARIA. And offering a foolish old man, his revenge I suppose.

MRS. H. How, dare you insult me in this manner, Miss?

MARIA. I was only following your polite example, madam.

MRS. H. You're an artful, mischievous, shocking little girl.

MARIA. And you're a rude, spiteful, malicious, married woman.

MRS. H. I've a good mind to pull your hair, about your ears.

MARIA. Do not, lest I should retaliate, and yours should come off in my hand, but, perhaps you will allow me to retire, madam; I have received sufficient entertainment from your agreeable conversation.

MRS. H. I am going, Miss.

MARIA. Thank you, madam.

MRS. H. But depend upon it, I return very shortly; (*aside*) a little brazen-faced minx. I'll return and see that old man, and—but I don't know what I'll do yet.

Exit, L.

MARIA. Oh, dear! my spirits kept me up while that vulgar creature was here, but now, I could set down and cry my eyes out.

Enter SERVANT, L.

SERVANT. Please Miss, a gentleman has been waiting for some time, he says he's master's secretary, and he asked to see you, but I told him you had a lady with you; shall he come in now, Miss?

MARIA. Oh, if he pleases—yes.

Exit, SERVANT, L.

But I know nothing about the "Times" correspondence; I only know I'm very wretched, and I'm sure the "Times" can't help me there. (*aside*) What, Harford!

Enter SIR HARRY, L.

SIR H. My dear Miss Bl—

MARIA. (*haughtily*) Sir, be kind enough to keep your distance.

SIR H. Pardon my having evaded your orders by an innocent ruse; knowing your uncle's peculiarity I took advantage of it, to engage as his secretary, and to be near you.

MARIA. (*scornfully*) Near me—your business is with, Mr. Block, I believe, sir, not with me. You can take a seat and await his return. (*going*)

SIR H. One moment, Miss Bland; Maria, will you listen to me.

MARIA. If you dare to address me in that style, sir, again—I will ring for the servants, and have you turned out of the house.

SIR H. What, can you mean by this language?

MARIA. Mean, sir, what I say; you who are so practised in deception may possibly be astonished at hearing plain speaking.

SIR H. Will you honour me, so far as to explain this strange meaning?

MARIA. I will, sir, and so doing, you hear my voice for the last time. You met me a young, inexperienced girl—spoke to me of love—I was weak enough to listen—with vows and protestations all spoken in the guise of honest truth. I do not blush now, to say you won affections—hitherto unawakened—how could I then guess

or dream, that he who thus perfidiously made himself master of my heart—had a lawful home, in the heart of another.

SIR H. Another?

MARIA. Shame on you, sir, to present that look of false amazement. Tell me what he deserves who thrives to compass the ruin of a trusting girl, and is at the time—a married man?

SIR H. A married man? Good heavens! what miserable delusion is this?

MARIA. You deny it?

SIR H. Can you ask me?

MARIA. No, I need not; your wife has been here, and told me all.

SIR H. My wife! I am dreaming, surely.

MARIA. No, sir; and, luckily, I have awoke in time. I leave you to your conscience, if, indeed, you have one; but never hope—base, perjured, and cruel as you are—ever to look upon my face again.

SIR H. But, for mercy's sake! let me explain—

MARIA. Not a word. If I desired any confirmation of your poor wife's story, I heard sufficient of your character, from one who knows you well enough, to avoid you.

SIR H. What villain is he? who has dared—

MARIA. I refer you, sir, to the Honourable Mr. Huntley.

Exit, R.

SIR H. Stop! Oh! what base machinery has been set in motion here! Huntley slander me? Impossible! I shall go mad if I do not get at some explanation. (*walks about excitedly*)

Enter BLOCK, L. with "Times" newspaper.

BLOCK. Ha! glad you're come! here's an article in the "Times."

SIR H. (*still walking peevishly*) Oh! damn the "Times."

BLOCK. (*aghast*) What do I hear? have you taken leave of your senses, Mr. Secretary?

SIR H. I believe I have, sir, or everybody else has; I cannot endure this. I must confess, sir, that I have gained admission to your house under false pretences.

BLOCK. Eh? here's another subject for the columns of the—What do you mean, sir?

SIR H. My name, sir, is Harford.

BLOCK. Halt there! hold hard! Are you the man that accused me of running after your wife?

SIR H. Wife again? Sir, I have no wife.

BLOCK. But I tell you that you were here just now, and said you had; that is, if your name's Harford. I can't recollect faces; but I know it, Harford was here, and—

SIR H. What diabolical agency can be at work? I, sir, am a gentleman, and my name is Harford. I dearly love your niece—

BLOCK. My niece again? Then, of course, you are a married man; your wife told me that distinctly, and she ought to know.

SIR H. Oh! the world's in league to drive me mad! Sir, I

again tell you I have no wife. I am Sir Harry Harford, and I simply demand your permission to address Miss Bland.

BLOCK. I wish to goodness somebody *would* take my niece away. The "Times" 'll go to rack and ruin if I'm distracted in this manner. I neither know nor care anything about you; settle it among yourselves. I'll send Maria to you, and if you'll divorce your other wife, and marry her, why I shall be heartily obliged to you.

Exit, R.

SIR H. What am I to do? How clear myself? The heaviest blow of all is the one dealt by Huntley; he must have traduced me. False friend, he shall repent it. I shall go mad presently, if someone doesn't unravel this infernal mystery.

Re-enter HUNTLEY, L. with a case of pistols.

HUNT. (*excited*) My wife's not at home; of course not; but lie you there, my friends. After I've blown Block's brains out, I'll ——Ha! Harry!

SIR H. (*L.*) A word, sir. Before we recommence our intercourse on such familiar terms, you are either belied, or you have played me a most ungenerous and unmanly trick.

HUNT. (*aside*) All's out.

SIR H. You are silent. It is true, then, that you have represented me to Miss Bland in such a light as to induce her to forbid me her presence for ever?

HUNT. My dear Harford, you'll thank me for it, by and bye. I don't deny it; but it was done purely and solely for your benefit.

SIR H. Allow me inform you, Mr. Huntley, that I consider myself perfectly capable of managing my own affairs, and that I take it as an affront for any man to interfere in the least of them, but in this case—to be slandered with her, upon whom depends my future happiness—is an outrage for which, I shall demand the fullest satisfaction.

HUNT. You're not serious?—why confound it, man, do you know what a wife is—here's mine a young, and pretty woman, and deuce take me if she hasn't got up an intrigue, with old Block here—a man old enough to be her father.

SIR H. That is your affair—do you withhold the satisfaction, I demand?

HUNT. Pooh, nonsense!

SIR H. Am I to consider you a coward as well as a slanderer?

HUNT. Sir Harry!

SIR H. Be assured, I will publish you as one throughout town.

HUNT. I will spare you that trouble, sir,—step into the garden (*producing pistols*) choose!

SIR H. (*taking one*) The sooner the better.

Enter MARIA, R.—seeing pistols she screams.

MARIA. Good heaven! what means all this?

SIR H. It means, madam that through this man's slander, I have lost your love, and therefore my life is of little use, and his belongs to me in recompence for my loss.

MARIA. For mercy's sake put down those horrid things; Mr. Huntley, speak to him—to me I would say.

HUNT. I will, Miss Bland; I confess that I thought I was doing my friend a service in saving him from matrimony, but now that I have seen you twice, I begin to doubt my propriety in the matter; all that I said of him was pure invention, and if you have heard elsewhere ought in his dispraise, it was calumny and invention too; but when I find my wife carrying on a flirtation with such a man as Block, what can I think of the sex.

MARIA. Your wife? but her name is —

HUNT. Mrs. Henry Huntley.

MARIA. Oh! I see it all—cruel error?

SIR R. Huntley, forgive me; your hand.

HUNT. My dear fellow (*replaces pistols*)

SIR H. You see, Miss Bland, how you wronged me—but that is past—will you listen to me now?

HUNT. Pshaw, man, leave Miss Bland to me, I want a little private conversation with her—in the garden, if she will grant it.

MARIA. With me, sir? I cannot—

HUNT. Refuse me, I know that. Harford leave yourself in my hands.

SIR H. A second time?

MARIA. Mr. Harford, my uncle desired me to send you to his library, it is yonder room, to the right.

HUNT. There be a good boy and do as you're told (*pushes him off R. 1 E.*) now, Miss Bland, will you oblige me with your arm.

MARIA. But what are you going to say, sir?

HUNT. Something that I hope will give cause for an announcement in your uncle's everlasting "Times" (*Exeunt by door at back.*)

Enter SERVANT and MRS. HUNTELY, L.

SERVANT. I will let Mr. Block know ma'am:

Exit R.

MRS. H. Yes, this is my course, this Mr. Block is a simpleton, I can wheedle him out of all he knows of Huntley and his visits here, so convict him, and possibly teach him a lesson in future

Re-enter BLOCK.

BLOCK. I've calmed him down wonderfully and left him hard at work; a lady want me, oh, Miss, Mrs. — (*aside*) bless me, this the married woman again?

MRS. H. Mr. Block will you answer me one question?

BLOCK. One dozen, ma'am, when you have answered me one—will you be kind enough to tell me whether you are married or not, and if so, how many husbands you have got.

MRS. H. Sir, that is a very impertinent question.

BLOCK. On the contrary, madam, it's a very pertinent one, because in the first place, I, whose whole time is devoted to a literary correspondence with a certain journal, am accused of having attempted to deprive some gentleman of his wife.

MRS. H. Ridiculous!

BLOCK. Very,—but the gentleman came and told me so himself

and then presently he comes and tells me he hasn't got a wife, and that he wants my niece.

MRS. H. That's my wretch.

BLOCK. Oh, that's your wretch, is it? I must make minutes of these proceedings—I'm really quite a fortune to that paper. Then, I suppose, we may take it for granted that he has got a wife; then it follows, as a matter of course, that you're the lady who's so desperately fond of me.

MRS. H. Surely, sir, you cannot mean to offend me.

BLOCK. Certainly not; but taste is all;—if you have an amiable weakness, by all means indulge it.

MRS. H. But, sir, you cannot seriously believe—

BLOCK. How can I possibly tell what to believe?—my niece tells me you're in love with me.

MRS. H. Your niece? don't allude to her, pray.

BLOCK. Your husband says your in love with me.

MRS. H. It was to shield his own vile purposes.

BLOCK. But, my dear Mrs. ——Dear me, I always forget your name.

MRS. H. Huntley, sir.

BLOCK. Huntley! Huntley! (*aside*) Damn it! this is some other man's wife, after all.

MRS. H. But, sir, will you tell me what you know of the shocking business between your niece and my husband?

BLOCK. What! is your husband after my niece too? Hang me, if I don't think there are a dozen married men after my niece, besides the gentleman who says he isn't married.

MRS. H. Sir, you torture me; but, be assured it is *my* husband who is the real culprit.

BLOCK. Well, he may be of the number, and perhaps the worst of 'em; but it's quite clear *you're* not my married woman, because her name's something else; when 'll *she* be produced, I wonder? However, the husband 'll soon be here, and he said he'd go and fetch her.

MRS. H. My husband gone to fetch *me*?

BLOCK. No, no; gone to fetch his wife.

MRS. H. Well, I am his wife.

BLOCK. How the deuce can you be two men's wife? you say you're Mrs. Huntley, how can you be Harford's wife, too?

MRS. H. Harford! Oh! you're in error he has no wife.

BLOCK. So he says—he will have it, I've got her.

MRS. H. Here is some mistake—what is his name who asked for your niece?

BLOCK. Don't I tell you, Harford.

MRS. H. (*eagerly*) And he who charged you with addressing his wife—does not he love your niece?

BLOCK. I should say not, since he distinctly asked me what he could want with her?

MRS. H. Oh! I see my error now, both names commence with H; Harford is Maria's lover, and my Harry is innocent. Oh! my dear, dear Mr. Block, I do indeed love you now!

Throws her arms round his neck as HUNTLEY and MARIA appear at back.

HUNT. One kiss I claim for my pains. (*kisses her—this action is simultaneous with the embrace of Mrs. H.—each couple discovers the other—HUNTLEY to his wife*) Traitress!

BLOCK. (*to MARIA*) Hussey!

MRS. H. (*to HUNTLEY*) Monster!

MARIA. (*L., to BLOCK*) Wicked old man?

HUNT. (*to Mrs. H.*) Perfidious woman! have I caught you at last; in his arms too.

Mrs. H. (*to HUNTLEY*) Doubly perfidious! have I detected you kissing that child before my face.

HUNTLEY. Pshaw! as for you, miscreant!

BLOCK. Miscreant, sir! what the devil do you mean by miscreant; didn't I see you kissing my niece?

HUNT. Didn't I catch you embracing my wife?

BLOCK. She isn't your wife, sir; you're an impostor!

MARIA. Oh, uncle, uncle! I am ashamed of you!

BLOCK. Be quiet, Miss! if you women will throw your arms round men's necks—

MARIA. Oh! fie, fie! I think it's my turn to write to the 'Times' now!

MRS. H. (*to MARIA*) You little wretch! didn't I see my husband kiss you before my face?

MARIA. You might have seen it, my dear, if you hadn't been otherwise engaged.

HUNT. Come, no more words. Kate, I renounce you. Mr. Block, (*producing pistols*) take your choice. (*WOMEN shriek in alarm*)

BLOCK. (*going to the wing, R.*) Secretary, write as I dictate:—"To the Editor of the Times,—Sir, I have just been invited to a breach of the Queen's peace"—

Enter SIR HARRY HARFORD, R.

SIR H. What is all this uproar about?

HUNT. Before I punish this man's profligacy, Harford, and add the crowning consequence to my wife's perfidy, take this lady, she loves you now, may she do so always, and not, like my wife, fall off from her allegiance!

MRS. H. Never, Henry, never!

HUNT. What, did I not see you in his arms?

MRS. H. For joy that you were guiltless of what I suspected you; Mr. Block undecieved me, and my gladness outran my discretion.

HUNT. May I believe this, Mr. Block?

BLOCK. That and anything else; I'm in a fog; I know nobody and nothing, and that's my state, Mr. Harford.

HUNT. Harford? pshaw! I remember now I have myself to blame for most of this. Kate, forgive me.

MARIA. And me too, Kate, will you?

MRS. H. Oh! how readily,

BLOCK. I think I can perceive that I'm losing a secretary in the confusion.

SIR H. On the contrary, sir, I have received your consent to my wooing this lady, and trust me, I will be an unwearied secretary.

BLOCK. Come along then. I've got a wonderful communication to make to the—

SIR H. Not to day—let us be quiet—and together let us laugh over the mistakes which have caused us this short discomfort.

BLOCK. (*coming forward*) And now, a word with you. You most of you take in the journal I am connected with. Stick to it! If you hear of unprincipled might knocking down modest right, and kicking it when it is down, write to the "Times." If you see quackery devouring sumptuous dinners, and merit cleaning the trenchers, write to the "Times." If you hear of impostors and hypocrites trading on the credulity of their neighbours, write to the "Times." And, lastly, if you are decoyed into a theatre by an unprincipled manager who doesn't set before you a satisfactory entertainment, why, all I can say to you is, just you "Write to the Times."

SIR H.

MARIA.

BLOCK.

MRS. H.

HUNTLEY.

R.

L.

Curtain.

Time in representation—50 minutes.

R.

R. C.

C.

L. C.

L.

Right. Right Centre. Centre. Left Centre. Left.

FACING THE AUDIENCE.