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NURSEY CHICKWEED

A FARCE

IN

ONE ACT

BY

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AUTHOR OF

*Ici on Parle Francais—I've Written to Browne—The Belle and the
Boor—Ruth Oakley—Gossip, !
&c. &c. &c.*

THOMAS HAILES LACY,

89, STRAND,

(Opposite Southampton Street, Covent Garden Market,)

LONDON.

913593

"NURSEY CHICKWEED."

*Produced at the Royal Princess's Theatre,
Under the direction of Mr. A. Harris,
On Saturday, 12th November, 1859.*

CHARACTERS.

JONATHAN CHICKWEED, <i>Town Crier, and Parish Bell Ringer</i>	.	Mr. H. WIDDICOMB.
BARNES, <i>a Miller</i>	.	Mr. SAKER.
MR. WALTON	.	Mr. HASTINGS.
MR. HORATIO MOUNTSORREL	.	Mr. MEADOWS.
MRS. MOUNTSORREL	.	Mrs. WESTON.
NELLY, <i>her Daughter—aged 14*</i>	.	Miss LOUISA KEELEY.

COSTUMES.

CHICKWEED.—Blue tail coat, glaring yellow velvet waistcoat, corduroy knee breeches, blue worsted stockings, lace-up boots.
2nd dress.—Cotton gown, handkerchief across shoulders, false curls, cap and frills.

BARNES.—Light coloured countryman's suit, covered with flour, red wig. 2nd dress.—Cotton gown, false curls, large white cap and frills.

WALTON.—Frock coat, &c.—railway rug. (Walking suit).

MOUNTSORREL.—Very precise make-up—broad-brimmed white hat, brown coat, bright buttons, &c.

Mrs. MOUNTSORREL.—Fashionable morning dress.

NELLY.—A coarse stuff frock, blue worsted stockings, thick hob-nailed boots. 2nd dress.—Boy's jacket and trousers (brown velveteen).

* Nelly's age can be slightly varied, so as to suit the appearance and abilities of the actress performing the part.

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“NURSEY CHICKWEED.”

SCENE.—*The Interior of a Somewhat Meanly Furnished Cottage.*—L. at back, a large fireplace—on the fire is a saucepan—principal entrance at back, through which is seen the High Street of the Village—doors, R. and L.—a table, L. C., on which is a large bell.

NELLY is discovered brushing a shabby great coat, which, when finished, she hangs on back of chair.

NELLY. (*brushing*) What a bother this spot is! it won't come out—I declare, if my arms don't ache again!

Enter BARNES, C. D.

BARNES. (*looking round—not seeing NELLY*) Now, then, Muster Chickweed, where be you?

NELLY. Why, if it isn't Barnes, the miller! Hallo, Miller, how are you?

BARNES. Why, Nelly, what be you so busy about?

NELLY. I'm brushing Nursey Chickweed's great coat for him!

BARNES. (*laughing*) Nursey Chickweed's great coat! Well, that is a good 'un! The hidea o' halludin' to Muster Jonathan Chickweed, bell ringer and town crier to this here parish, as Nursey!

NELLY. (*sharply*) What else am I to call him? He is my nurse, isn't he?

BARNES. There she goes again! Ha, ha! your nurse, indeed! do nurses wear great coats like this here, I should like to know. (*taking up great coat*) But where is he—I want to speak to him very partick'lar.

NELLY. He's trying on his new velvet waistcoat. (*eagerly*) Such a beauty! All yaller—with such splendacious glass buttons!

BARNES. Well, I never! a town crier in a yaller velvet veskit and glass buttons—here's luxuries! and all along a' takin' in young 'uns to nurse! Ho, ho, ho! what a prime dodge it was, to be sure!

NELLY. (*at fireplace—looking into saucepan*) The water's boiling! Now, then, to pop the vegetables into the saucepan! What prime pea soup this will be to be sure! (*puts vegetables into saucepan, and begins blowing fire with bellows*)

BARNES. (*aside*) Pea soup, indeed! Ho, ho, ho! I can't help laughing when I think that this here diminutive leetle cretur's paryents are a payin' so much reg'lar every year, for her board and lodging—and hedification—in the art o' makin' pea soup! (*calling impatiently*) Now, then, Muster Chickweed, I can't stop here all day!

CHICKWEED. (*without*) I'm just a buttonin' my last button.

Enter CHICKWEED, l. 1 E.—he is attired in a glaring yellow waistcoat, corduroy breeches, an enormous shirt collar, and hob-nailed boots.

Mornin', Barnes—sorry to keep you a waitin', Barnes, but these button holes is zummat o' the stiffest.

BARNES. (*admiringly*) Well, Muster Chickweed, you *har a swell!*

CHICK. (*complacently*) Ees, Muster Barnes, it be a natish style o' thing loike—yaller suits my complexion like.

BARNES. But I say, I'ze gotten a job for you—there's Farmer Wheatear as has lost a watch and seals, and he wants 'em cried. Here's the partick'lars. (*giving CHICKWEED a paper*)

CHICK. (*looking at paper*) What, only five shillings reward? Now how can they expect people to be honest at such a werry low figure? Howsomdever, I'll cry the article in my usual hartick'late manner. (*looking round at NELLY*) Hallo, young missus, what ha' you been up to this morning?

NELLY. (*coming forward*) I've been out to buy the cowheel for dinner—the old covey wanted to give me short weight, but I let him know what's o'clock!

CHICK. (l.) That I'll be bound you did—she's got the 'cuteness o' two dozen children, and the plumpness o' a whole charity school. Just look at her, Barnes—there's legs, there's harms! that's my style o' training up young ladies as is entrusted to my nussin'.

BARNES. And a mortal good style it be too. Where be t'other young 'un this morning?

CHICK. What, Joey?

BARNES. (r.) Ay!

CHICK. Oh, I'ze lent 'un to Farmer Buttercup to help make the hay—he lent me his donkey, so I lent him my Joey—it be a sort o' swop loike. How's the pea soup getting on, little missey?

NELLY. It's a simmering away first-rate!

CHICK. Then take this here ha'penny and run and buy Nursey Chickweed a pipe. (*NELLY comes down, c.*)

NELLY. (*c.*) A long 'un, with a sealing waxed end, or a short 'un, with a dog's head?

CHICK. As long a one as you can get for the money, and don't get a stoppin' to over them posteses. Look sharp!

NELLY. I'll be back in the twinkling of a bed post.

Exit, c. d., running and singing.

CHICK. (*admiringly*) What a little woman o' busiess it is! Ah, her parents ought to settle summat 'ansum on me for the way I ha' trained that 'ere child up.

BARNES. They ought, indeed, Muster Chickweed. But to think of a parish bell ringer and town crier being a nuss into the bargain! Ho, ho, ho! how funny it do seem to be sure!

CHICK. Ees, it be a rum start. But sit ye down, miller, and I'll tell 'ee how it fell about. (*they bring forward chairs, and sit*) Nigh upon fourteen year ago, Barnes, Squire Morton, as used to live near this here village, says to me one day—says he, “ You arn’t got no family of your own yet, Chickweed—d’ye think your wife ’ud like to take in young ‘uns to nuss? ‘cos I knows a married couple up in Lunnon as is a goin’ abroad, to South Ameriky, and doesn’t want to take their infant with ’em.” Well, you know, Barnes, we was so precious hard up in them ‘ere days, we’d ha’ taken a young giant to nuss, if his father and mother ’ud only a paid ‘ansum for him! So the lady and gen’leman inquires arter our references, which was fuss-rate—we strike the bargain, and home we bring little Miss Nelly Mountsorrel, a squeakin’ like a young suckin’ pig.

BARNES. Nelly Mountsorrel! what a noble appellation!

CHICK. Well, you know, Barnes, it never rains but it pours, and a few weeks arterwards, a melancholy young man in black, having heard as how we took in hinfants to nuss, calls here, and says as how he was a widower, with a young male horf-spring, which he didn’t know what the dickens to do with, seeing as how he was obligated for to start for Porty-Ricky, or the Alleghany Mountains, or some o’ them ‘ere fashionable waterin’ places on partick’lar business, so we undertakes the care o’ hinfant number two, Joseph Montague by name—the quarterly payment in regard of both babbies, to be made us by the agents in Lunnon. Well, Barnes, all went on well enough

for two years or so, when—(*producing a check pocket handkerchief*) when I had the misfortin' to lose Mrs. Chickweed.

BARNES. Ah, I remember—she cut away with a corporal in the militia.

CHICK. (*much affected*) Now doant 'ee, Barnes—doant 'ee remind me o' that 'ere hinfortunate hinteraction to my connubial felicity. Well, there was I left to myself, with two young hinfants to dry nuss.

BARNES. Why didn't you send 'em back to their paryents?

CHICK. Now, there's a question! Why, because I should ha' had to send my forty pounds a-year back along with them!

BARNES. To be sure, Muster Chickweed—I never thought of that!

CHICK. Besides, the paryents was abroad. Luckily the young 'uns had already arrived at a hage when female assistance warn't no longer indispensably necessary. So I reared 'em up myself, Barnes, and I flatter myself I've done the thing in a werry supperior style—hair and hexercise, and not too much book larnin', that's my plan. I pays the willage schoolmaster half-a-crown a month, to write me what we calls a monthly report, hincludin' a specimen o' the juvenile's handwritin', which we forwards to the agents in town—it saves them the trouble o' coming down, and they sends 'em off to the paryents, in foreign parts, just to keep their minds easy loike. (*rises*) By the bye, this be the day for sending young Nelly's letter. Schoolmaster wrote 'un for me yesterday—here he be. (*produces letter from his pocket, and places it on table*) I'll just get 'ee to post it as ye go along, Barnes.

BARNES. All right, Muster Chickweed—and when do the parents think o' comin' back agin?

CHICK. Darned if I knows—I hope they won't never come back! At any rate, they'll be safe to give me a good long notice—so I shall know when to 'spect 'em.

NELLY appears at door at back, c.

NELLY. (*speaking off*) Come on, you young sneak. Ah, you're afraid—you know what you'd get!

CHICK. (*rising*) Why, what's up now?

NELLY. Oh, nothing particular—I've just been having a round with Master Sprouts, the greengrocer's boy—he wanted to cheat at marbles, but I gave it him—I polished him off in double quick time.

CHICK. (*highly gratified*) That's your sort, my little thoroughbred—that's the way to make the little vagabonds respect your

sex! (*sententiously*) And a werry gratifyin' thing it is to see a young gal a takin' her own part in this here way.

BARNES. (*aside*) I wonder if he charges for boxin' as one o' his extras!

NELLY. (*producing a pipe broken in two pieces*) And here's your pipe!

CHICK. (*taking the pieces, and looking askance*) Not quite so gratifyin'. Howsomdever, now to bisness—it's time for you to go and look arter the turkeys in the field yonder.

NELLY. Oh, ah! but not till you've cut me off a snack o' something to take with me! I mean to have some bacon—and a good large lump too!

CHICK. So you shall—so you shall! (*aside*) What a gal it is! she never forgets nothink—'specially her meals!

(*goes to cupboard, cuts a slice of bacon, and an enormous hunch of bread, which he hands to NELLY*)

NELLY. (*taking them*) Call that a slice? Why, that arn't half enough! (*lays bread and bacon in her pinafore, and puts on an old wide-a-wake hat*) Now, then, I'm off. I say, nussey, look sharp after the pea soup, you know! (*going, c.*)

NELLY. (*sings*)

"For I seed a king at Bart'lemy fair,
Look more like a king than that chap there.

Ri too loo ral, &c." Exit.

CHICK. Mark my words, Barnes, that 'ere child will be a treasure to her paryents, and a hornament to society.

BARNES. She will, indeed, Muster Chickweed—but I must be gettin' back to my mill. Don't forget that 'ere watch and seals!

CHICK. You'll hear me a cryin' on 'em presently in the market place. Let's see—where's my bell?

MOUNTSORREL. (*without, L. C.*) This way, my dear—this must be the house.

CHICK. Hollo, here be sum 'un coming.

Enter MR. and MRS. MOUNTSORREL, C. from L.

MOUNT. (*drawlingly*) Yes, I knew I was not mistaken! Why, there's the worthy Chickweed himself!

CHICK. (*surprised—making a bow*) Want anything cried, your honour?

MRS. M. Why, my good fellow, don't you remember us?

CHICK. Can't say I do, marm—and yet—(*scratching his head*) I seems to have a sort of a hindistinct hidea that I've seen you somewhere!

MOUNT. What, don't you remember—Mr. and Mrs. Mount-sorrel?

CHICK. (*dumfoundered—aside to BARNES*) Nelly's father and mother, by jingo!

BARNES. (*aside*) Well, this is a pretty go!

MRS. M. We thought we'd take you by surprise.

CHICK. (*aside*) By gum, you've done it too!

MOUNT. We returned to England yesterday. Our first visit was to our agent in town, who was quite astonished to see us, and wanted to set off for little Nelly himself, but we were so impatient to see the dear child, that we couldn't wait—so off we started ourselves. But where is the little darling?

CHICK. (*excessively confused*) She's out along wi' the turk—

MOUNT. Eh?

CHICK. (*stammering*) A—a—I mean, she's practizing her *pehannny*! (*aside to BARNES*) Cut arter her, there's a good fellow—scrape her up a bit, make her wash her face, and put on her clean pin-be-fore!

BARNES I'm off like a shot! Here's a pretty kettle o' fish!

Exit c., off L.

CHICK. (*nervously*) The young 'un—a—a—I mean Miss Nelly will be here directly—a—a—that 'ere genl'man's gone to fetch her.

MOUNT. And how is the dear child?

CHICK. (*convulsively*) Out and out prime! (*aside*) Here's a precious turn out!

MOUNT. I wonder now which she most resembles? Has she grown pretty?

CHICK. Hangelic—a minnitur *Venus*!

MRS. M. And her excellent nurse, Mistress Chickweed is well I hope? Where is she?

CHICK. (*aside*) Gracious goodness ha' mussey upon me! (*excessively confused*) She's a practizing her *pehannny* forty—no—she's—she's a hangin' out the clothes.

MRS. M. I long to see the worthy woman, that I may thank her for the trouble, the affection she has bestowed on our darling child!

CHICK. (*idiotically tying knots in his pocket handkerchief*) To be sure—werry nat'r'l. (*aside*) What a precious shame it is o' people to come and take other people by surprise in this here way!

MOUNT. Fetch Nurse Chickweed at once, pray!

CHICK. D'rectly—d'rectly. (*going, c., returns—endeavouring to change the conversation—stammering*) You don't happen to ha' seen our village pump—built in the reign o' William the Conqueror—first turnin' to the right, and keep straight on!

MRS. M. We'll see all that by and bye, but our darling child and her worthy nurse must be our first thought. (*sits, L.*)

CHICK. (*aside*) What's to be done? I daren't tell 'em about Mistress Chickweed's 'lopement—I must find 'em a nuss somewhere. (*struck by a sudden idea—violently*) Ah!

MRS. M. } MOUNT. } (*starting*) What's the matter?

CHICK. I—I'll run and fetch her. (*aside*) I'll bring 'em Mother Sloeleaf—she's as deaf as a post, and 'll say "yes" to anything. *Exit.*

MOUNT. (*affectedly*) What a refreshing air of rustic simplicity and ingenuous candour is discernible on the honest features of this excellent fellow.

MRS. M. True love. (*languidly*) Do you know, my Horatio, as the moment for re-union with our darling Nelly draws nigh, I reproach myself for having so long remained away from her.

MOUNT. (*drawlingly*) So do I, my sweetest Clementina Jane. But it couldn't be helped—the journey to South America would have killed our little poppet at that tender age. Besides, it's much better as it is. Her letters, forwarded to our agent for transmission to us, prove that healthy and invigorating recreation has gone hand in hand with the acquirement of the most elegant accomplishments. (*crosses to table, L., places his hat on table—while so doing, he perceives the letter placed there by CHICKWEED—taking it up*) A letter addressed to me—and in Nelly's hand writing I declare! They were evidently just about to forward it to ns!

MRS. M. (*eagerly*) Sweet little cherub! Let's hear what she says.

MOUNT. (*reading*) "My dear parents—I am so strong and hearty, that I weigh six pounds heavier than when you last heard from me." (*stopping*) It's very extraordinary—for the last twelve months she has written to us regularly every month, and in each letter she says she's six pounds heavier than when she last wrote! Let me see—six times twelve make seventy-two—seventy-two pounds in one year! That's rather rapid development!

MRS. M. Some trifling arithmetical inaccuracy. Go on, pray!

MOUNT. (*continuing*) "I want to stay here until I'm eighteen." Good gracious! what will she weigh, then, I wonder? "The doctor says the air of any other part of England would be sure to disagree with me."

MRS. M. How strange! Well, we shall be the best judge of that. Proceed!

MOUNT. (*continuing*) "I am learning hydrostatics, pneumatics, phrenology, archaeology, and the use of the globes."

MRS. M. Dear me!

MOUNT. (*continuing*) "Besides music, singing, and calisthenics—I'm just going to take a lesson in agricultural chemistry, so no more, at present, from your dutiful daughter—Nelly."

MRS. M. Affectionate little soul! (*taking letter*) What a remarkably bold hand she writes!

Enter Barnes, L. 1 E.

BARNES. (*aside*) Now dash my wig, where's Chickweed? The clean pinbefore's locked up in the next room cupboard, and I arn't got the key!

MOUNT. What's the matter, my good man?

BARNES. (*confused*) Nothink, your honour. (*aside*) The young un's outside, and a pretty pickle she's in! She would stop to have a game at fly the garter with a butcher boy, and she's had a downer in the mud!

MRS. M. But where's our little Nelly? I thought you went to fetch her?

BARNES. (*confused*) Oh, of course—that's to say—sartinly. (*aside—anxiously*) Now where has that darned Chickweed been an' got to?

NELLY. (*heard outside, crying*) Oh, dear—oh, dear—oh, dear!

MRS. M. A youthful voice!

MOUNT. } (*together*) It must be our child!

MRS. M. }

MOUNT. The little angel! I wonder, now, which of us she most resembles? (*they rush eagerly at entrance at back*)

BARNES. (*aside*) If they recognise her in the pickle she's in—the woice o' nature must be a precious loud un!

Enter Nelly, at back, covered with mud—she has a dab on the tip of her nose, and one on each cheek—MR. and MRS. MOUNT-SORREL draw back disappointed.

NELLY. Oh, dear—oh, dear! my nice bit o' bacon has fallen into the mud. (*cries*) Oh, oh, oh!

MRS. M. (*vexed*) Why, it's some poor little village girl! What a disappointment!

Enter CHICKWEED, L. D., out of breath from running.

CHICK. (*aside—not seeing NELLY*) It ben't no good—Mother Sloeleaf's got the dololdrum trimmings, and can't come!

BARNES. (*approaching him—aside*) Gie us the key to get the pinbefore.

CHICK. (*giving key—aside*) Here you are, look sharp, there's a blessed Barnes.

NELLY. (*bursting out into another fit of crying*) My nice bit o' bacon ! he, he, he !

CHICK. (*perceiving NELLY*) Why, there she is ! Now, bless my soul, she's been at they cussed postesses again ! How werry vexatious !

(*in a state of tremendous excitement, he seizes a jack towel, rushes at NELLY, and begins scrubbing her face*)

NELLY. (*calling out*) Do-o-n't ! you're pinching my nose !

MRS. M. Well, Mr. Chickweed, we're all impatience !

CHICK. (*nervously*) All right, yer honour's worship—stop till she's got her clean pinbefore on.

MRS. M. (*looking carelessly at NELLY*) She certainly requires something of the sort ; I wonder you don't take a little more pains with your own child.

CHICK. (*astonished*) My own child ! what child ?

MRS. M. (*pointing to NELLY*) That child !

CHICK. This child ! (*aside*) Oh, dear—oh, dear ! they think she's my child—I've got to interdooce her !

Re-enter BARNES, with pinafore.

CHICK. (*aside to BARNES*) Put it on, there's a dear, good man, for I'm that narwious, I'm shakin' all over.

NELLY. (*while the pinafore is being put on—joyfully*) My best Sunday going pinbefore ! why, where are we off to ?

CHICK. (*aside*) Hold your young tongue !

MOUNT. My good man, I request that you will, without further delay, produce our beloved child—we are all anxiety to know which of us she most resembles.

CHICK. Comin', your honour's worship—comin'. (*aside to NELLY*) Blow your young nose ! (*aloud*) You mustn't mind her being just a leetle sunburn't you know. (*aside to NELLY*) Hold your young 'ed up !

MOUNT. (*bawling*) But where is she ?

CHICK. } (*pushing her forward—together*) Why, here she
BARNES. } is !

MRS. M. (*screaming*) That our child ?

MOUNT. (*horrified*) Incredible—improbable—impossible ! (*crosses to NELLY—rushing forward, and looking at NELLY's arm*) But, yes it is—here's the strawberry leaf upon her arm.

NELLY. Dear me, what's the matter with 'em all ?

MOUNT. (*pathetically*) A Miss Mountsorrel in blue worsted stockings and hob-nailed boots !

MRS. M. Our only daughter in this distracting plight ?

CHICK. (*stammering*) A—a—our parish doctor said that genteel children always required warm clothin', and main well she thrives wi' it too. Why, she be as strong as a young colt ! (*abruptly*) Show the lady your legs, Nelly.

NELLY. (*raising the end of her dress*) There—what d'ye think of 'em, now you do see 'em ?

CHICK. (*admiringly*) There's plumpness ! Blessed if she wouldn't fetch the medal at a prize child show !

BARNES. (R.—*approvingly*) So she would, Muster Chickweed—so she would.

MRS. M. (*angrily*) Plumpness has nothing to do with the matter. Where's the beautiful yellow velvet we sent over to make her a dress ? (*crosses to NELLY*)

CHICK. (*aside*) Dash my wig—I've gotten it on ! I had 'un made up into this here veskit !

(*hurriedly ties towel round his neck, like a table napkin, in order to conceal waistcoat*)

MOUNT. But it isn't *he we* have to blame for all this, it's that wretched woman, his wife—we insist upon seeing Mistress Chickweed immediately ! (*goes up, c.*)

CHICK. (*dumbfounded*) Immediately ? a—a—(*aside—tragically*) Missus Jonathan Chickweed, what a precious fix you've gone and left me in ! What shall I do for a Missus Chickweed ? (*aside—slapping his thigh*) I knows what I'll do !

BARNES. (*slapping his thigh—aside to CHICKWEED*) So does I ! (*crosses*)

CHICK. (*to MR. and MRS. MOUNTSORREL*) Nurse Chickweed 'ull be here directly. (*aside—joyfully*) Fuss-rate ! *Exit, L.*

BARNES. (*aside*) Slap up ! *Exit, R.*

NELLY. And so you're my real daddy and mammy, that Nursey Chickweed tells me about ? (*approaching MOUNTSORREL, and playing with his eye-glass*) I say, old chap, what's the use of this shiney swing-swang ?

MOUNT. (*starting up*) Old chap ! swing-swang ! My dear child, a young lady should say, " Beloved parent, what is the precise application of this resplendent appendage ?" (*taking her by the hand, and leading her to MRS. MOUNTSORREL—by whose side he seats himself*) After all, my dear, the child is by no means ill-looking—there's a great deal of her father about her.

MRS. M. (*examining her*) Yes, and I've no doubt that when she is properly dressed and—

NELLY. (*suddenly breaking from them*) Crikey, there's our pea soup boiling over ! (*rushes over to fireplace*)

MRS. M. What fearfully plebeian language ! My dear child, what are you doing ?

NELLY. I'm skimming the pot.

MOUNT. Skimming the pot! (*tragically*) A scion of the Mountsorrels engaged in pot skimming!

NELLY. Why, dash my wig! here's the fire going out—I must put on some coals.

(*while uttering these words, she runs, with shovel, to wooden box in corner, gets coals, and as she is returning towards fireplace, runs against MOUNTSORREL, who has advanced to remonstrate with her*)

MOUNT. (*thoroughly winded*) Ugh—bless my soul!

NELLY. Hallo, old gen'l'man, why don't you keep your own side o' the road?

(*puts coals on fire, which she stirs and arranges—singing meanwhile*)

MOUNT. You never alluded to all this distressing vulgarity in your letters!

NELLY. My letters! Ha, ha, ha! well, that is a pretty joke! Why, I don't know how to write!

MOUNT (*horrified*) Not know how to write! then what do they teach you at school?

NELLY. School! I never go to school! playing at hop-scotch is a precious deal better than school! When they did send me, I used always to play the wag.

MOUNT. Play the wag! what monstrous phraseology! But if you don't go to school, what do you do?

NELLY. Oh, there's plenty to do! I look after the chickabiddies, feed the rabbits, water the potatoe ground, cook the dinner, and then o' afternoons I go out blackberryin'.

MOUNT. Blackberrying! What a frightfully vulgar recreation!

NELLY. (*animatedly*) And then, you know, every now and then, when I've been very good, and haven't thrown stones, Nursey Chickweed takes me to the tea gardens, and there we drink cider and peppermint, (*smacking her lips*) and play at knock-em-downs.

MOUNT. (*distracted*) Knock-em-down!

NELLY. (*growing still more animated*) Yes, and sometimes little Joey comes with us, and then we have a game at kiss in the bush!

MOUNT. (*horrified*) Kiss in the bush with little Joey! Who the devil's little Joey?

NELLY. He's my little sweetheart he is—and when I'm a big girl, I'm going to be married to him, I am!

MOUNT. A precocious attachment for a juvenile clodhopper! Monstrous!

NELLY. (*continuing*) And then Barnes, the miller, brings his

fiddle, and plays all manner o' pretty tunes, and then Joey and I, we dance the cobbler's hornpipe!

(starts off into cobbler's hornpipe—MR. and MRS. MOUNTSOR-
REL vainly endeavour to restrain her)

MRS. M. (disgusted) The cobbler's hornpipe!

MOUNT. (while she continues to dance all round the stage) The
cobbler's hornpipe! is this what they meant by calisthenics?

NELLY dances off, R. C., singing.
I can stand this no longer! where is that wretched nurse, the
atrocious cause of all this?

MRS. M. We must have an instant explanation.

MOUNT. (calling, L.) Nurse Chickweed!

MRS. M. (calling, R.) Nurse Chickweed!

Enter, simultaneously, MILLER BARNES, R. and CHICKWEED, L.—both dressed up in women's clothes, as nurses.

BARNES. (L.) }
CHICK. (R.) } (together) Here I be!

MOUNT. (amazed) What, two Nurse Chickweeds!

CHICK. (aside) Darn'd if there bean't Barnes!

BARNES. (aside) Dashed if there bean't Chickweed!

CHICK. (aside—trying to sneak off) Here's off! one nuss is
enough.

BARNES. (aside—trying ditto) I'm fly! we're just one too
many here!

MRS. M. (R. C.—stopping BARNES, and bringing him back)
Wait a moment, if you please.

MOUNT. (stopping CHICKWEED, and bringing him back) Not
so fast, I beg!

MRS. M. Now which of you two is Nurse Chickweed?

BARNES. }
CHICK. } (making signs to each other) It's—(both stop short).

MOUNT. Well!

CHICK. (dropping a curtsey) A—a—please your honour, I—
I be Nurse Chickweed.

BARNES. (aside) If he be Nurse Chickweed, who the dickens
be I, I wonder? We was hevidently both struck with the
hidentical hidea!

CHICK. (R. C.—endeavouring to change the subject, and making
signs to BARNES) Hallo, Mrs. Sloeleaf—Good morning. What
be you come here for?

BARNES. (confused) A—a—I be come, Missus Chickweed—
a—I be come to borrow a blow o' your bellows, and a few
tatters on ye.

CHICK. (L. C.) Werry good, Missus Sloeleaf—mind you pay

'em back you know. (*to MOUNTSORREL*) This here 'ooman's always a borrowin' my tatars.

BARNES. (*who has meanwhile filled his apron from box in corner—angrily*) And if I be, you're always a borrowin' my frying-pan!

CHICK. No, I bean't.

BARNES. Yes, you be.

CHICK. (*feigning to get into a passion*) Go along with you—you old prig! *Drives Barnes out, C. D. off R.*

BARNES. (*at door*) Get out, you miserly old skinflint.

Exit, c. off R.

MRS. M. (*languidly*) What distracting vulgarity!

(sits in chair up R.)

MOUNT. Now, then, Mrs. Chickweed, we wish to speak to you seriously.

MRS. M. Very seriously.

CHICK. (*aside*) My wig, I be in for it now! (*aloud*) A—a—wouldn't your worship like to take a drop o' summat short?—a snack o' dog's nose, or a glass o' hot elder wine?

MRS. M. (*sternly*) Nothing of the sort, you perfidious woman! We find our daughter totally deficient in every one of the acquirements alluded to in her letters!

MOUNT. Her letters, indeed! Why, she is as ignorant of writing as she is of hydrostatics, or agricultural chemistry—the child knows nothing!

CHICK. Beggin' your honour's parding, you'll find she knows a deal more than you think for—she's a main good judge o' summer cabbages and spring hingons! You see, she was just a leetle shy loike at first.

MRS. M. Shy! I wish she was! (*angrily*) I say, woman, you have brought up our child more like a milk maid than a young lady.

CHICK. (*whimpering, and producing handkerchief*) And this is all the thanks I gets for the continual hanxiety, the sleepless nights as that 'ere darling child has cost me! (*blubbering aloud*) Ho, ho, ho! it's a shame it is! *(sinks into chair)*

Enter NELLY, c. from R., with a pitchfork over her shoulder—on the prong of the pitchfork is a wisp of hay.

NELLY. Well, Neddy's had his feed—by jingo, I'm pretty nigh ready for mine! That pea-soup must be done by this time, surely. (*perceiving CHICKWEED in woman's clothes—approaching chair*) Hallo! why—ha, ha, ha! Why, what has Nursey Chickweed got on? Why, nursey, what an old guy you look! I thought you were the old washerwoman!

CHICK. (*aside*) My eye—my eye—my eye! (*aside to NELLY*)

Run and play in the back yard, and you shall have some treacle pudding.

NELLY. Treacle puddin' ! oh, how nice! (*dances about*) Hallo! (*looking off*) There's our black pig got loose among the brocoli sprouts. Won't I make him squeak again!

Runs off, c. to R.

CHICK. (*aside—rising*) Cuss that black pig! (*endeavouring to change the conversation.*) A—a—wouldn't your honours like to see our pump, built by Alexander the Great—fust turnin' to the right.

MOUNT. No, woman—we do *not* wish to see your pump, but we wish to see your husband.

CHICK. (*starting*) What, my old man?

MRS. M. We shall not leave our child another day under your roof—but before going, we have a few words to say to Mr. Chickweed. Meanwhile, do you prepare Nelly for our departure—and be sure you put her on the new velvet dress I sent for her—let there be *no* mistake mind.

CHICK. (*sulkily*) All right, marm.

Exeunt MR. and MRS. MOUNTSORREL, c. off L.
What a worrit she keeps up about that 'ere paltry velvet dress! I wish they was at Jericho, the pair on 'em! Young Joey's parents is the sort o' people for *my* money—they don't come here a botherin' and blusterin'! No, they've got more sense—if there was only time I'd have this here cussed vesket onpicked, and made up into a frock agin !

Enter MR. WALTON, c. from R.

WALTON. (R.) Is Nurse Chickweed within?

CHICK. (L.—*aside*) What be up now? (*aloud*) Nurse Chickweed! I be Nurse Chickweed.

WALTON. (*aside*) What an excessively masculine looking woman! (*aloud*) I have called, at the request of Mr. Montague's agent, whose clerk I am—to inform you that Mr. Montague will return to England in a few days—and to inquire at the same time how master Joseph is getting on!

CHICK. (*aside, tragically*) Now this about butters it!

WALTON. I should like to see the young gentleman—where is he?

CHICK. (*hysterically*) A—a—he aint at home just at present. (*aside*) My eye! he's hay-making ten miles off.

WALTON. Well, you'd better send for him at once. Meanwhile, I'll take a stroll round the village—I shall return in five minutes.

Exit c.

CHICK. (*ruefully*) I do believe Old Nick himself is a tryin' to spite me this here blessed day!

Enter Barnes, l. 2 e.

BARNES. Well, Muster Chickweed, how's things a goin' now?

CHICK. (*doggedly*) Goin'! why, *wus* and *wus!* here's Joey's agent just come down.

BARNES. Well I never!

CHICK. What's to be done? I can't run ten miles an' back agin in five minutes, and I daresn't tell him as how I've lent young Joey in *swop* for a *donkey*!

BARNES. Well this is a pretty kettle of fish!

CHICK. (*struck by a sudden idea*) I knows what we'll do. We'll put Nelly into young Joey's Sunday clothes. The sight o' her will satisfy the *hagent*—'cos for why—he aren't never seen neither on 'em—and away he'll start for town, before the Mountsorrels gets back.

BARNES. (*admiringly*) Well, Muster Chickweed, you *har a* hinwintive genius, and *no* mistake!

CHICK. Now, then, Barnes, while I take these petticoats off, do you make young Nelly pop on little Joey's togs—they're all in the bedroom cupboard. Look sharp, there's a *dear, good* Barnes, or I'm reg'lar done for!

BARNES. (*aside*) I won't take to *dry nussing* in a hurry.

Exit, c.

CHICK. (*alone*) Now if the Mountsorrels 'll only keep out another couple o' minutes, it'll be all right. (*starting*) Darned if I arn't quite forgot that 'ere watch and seals as I'd got to cry! I shall lose my sitiuation as sure as a gun! if I hadn't got these petticoats on, (*taking up bell*) I'd step out and—(*in a tone of intense disappointment*) Now, dash my wig, here they be a'ready! (*in his agitation he involuntarily rings bell*)

Enter Mr. and Mrs. Mountsorrel, c.

MRS. M. Why, good gracious me, what are you doing with that *monstrous bell*?

MOUNT. (R. C.) I never knew such an eccentric woman in all my life. What may be the use of that *gigantic tintinnabulum*?

CHICK. (L. C., *excessively confused, and stammering violently*) It's a—a—a—little thing as I bought at our last fair—a—a—to put Nelly to sleep with.

MOUNT. (*detaining him*) Well, your husband's nowhere to be found. We can wait no longer, and must start at once without seeing him. Is Nelly ready?

CHICK. (*in terrific agitation*) Werry nigh! (*aside*) Now if I could only—

Enter Barnes leading in Nelly, l. d. 2 e., dressed in boy's clothes—brown velvet jacket and trousers.

BARNES. (*not seeing Mr. and Mrs. Mountsorrel*) Here she is!

MOUNT. { MRS. M. } (*amazed*) Our Nelly in boy's clothes!

NELLY. (*aside, complacently*) Little Joey's things just fit me!

CHICK. (*aside*) It's all up now! how the devil be I to get o'w o' this? (*in his utter confusion he begins ringing the bell he holds in his hand*)

MOUNT. (*to Chickweed*) Atrocious female! will you explain the meaning of this unaccountable transformation?

MRS. M. (*to Nelly*) My dear child, why are you dressed up in this absurd fashion?

NELLY. (*knowingly*) I know, but I'm not going to tell—I've been told not to. Ah!

MRS. M. But where's the beautiful velvet dress I sent you?

CHICK. (*hurriedly pointing to the brown velvet trousers which Nelly has on*) That's it—you see—a—a—(*stuttering violently*) the dressmaker had the toothache dreadful bad, and —a—a—a—her husband, being a tailor by trade, and not knowing never no better, poor man—a—a—(*idiotically*) he made it up into breeches.

MRS. M. But that's brown velvet, and the piece I sent was yellow.

CHICK. (*stuttering*) Yes, marm, but you see—a—a—it was horful hot last summer, and a—a—the sun's just turned 'em a little.

MRS. M. Dear me! the woman's a raving lunatic. Pack up our child's things and we'll quit this dreadful place immediately!

MOUNT. We will, my love, for I assure you I'm beginning to feel quite alarmed.

Exeunt c.

CHICK. (*taking Nelly's hand*) Oh, dear! oh, dear! and so they're a going to take my poor dear Nelly away. I shall never get over it, Barnes—I knows I shan't.

BARNES. I feels all queer like myself, blessed if I don't!!

Enter Mr. Walton, c. from R.

CHICK. (*aside*) Just in the nick o' time! (*aloud*) The little chap, the young gen'lman, I mean, be come in from his walk!

WALTON. (*approaching Nelly*) Well, the young fellow doesn't look amiss certainly. Do you know, Mrs. Chickweed, I've been thinking that at his father will be home so soon, I may as well take the young gentleman back with me at once.

(*taking Nelly's hand*)

CHICK. }
BARNES. } (starting violently) What!

WALTON. It will save me a second journey, so pack up the little fellow's things immediately, for I've important business in town, and mustn't lose this next train on any account.

CHICK. (aside tragically) Horrible situation! I feels my hair a turnin' grey with downright worrit. (aloud) A—a—I can't pack up nothink—the young gen'lman's things are all gone to the wash. (railway bell heard.)

WALTON. (pulling out watch) By Jove, that's my train! I can't wait—I'd no idea it was so late!

BARNES. } (eagerly) Run—run! You've just time to
CHICK. } catch it!

They all three run him up to the door and push him out, c.

BARNES. (calling after him) There aren't another till next Tuesday week. Cut!

CHICK. Oh dear—oh, dear! that was a close shave. (sinking into a chair) This here ewentful day has been a lesson to me. I'll never pretend to be what natur never intended me for again. I'll never dewiate from the straight path no more.

Re-enter MR. and MRS. MOUNTSORREL, C.

MRS. M. Now, then, Nelly, put on your things, say good bye to that wicked nurse of yours, and come home with us.

NELLY. What! go away from Nursey Chickweed for good and all. I won't—I won't—I won't!

(clinging to the skirt of Chickweed's dress.)

CHICK. (pathetically wiping away a tear) Poor little dear!

NELLY. I want to stay her till I'm eighteen, and I will stay here, too!

MOUNT. (trying to catch hold of NELLY, who keeps dodging round CHICKWOOD) This is all very well in it's way, but we can't stop here all day long.

NELLY. (running round and round CHICKWEED) I won't leave little Joey, nor my darling donkey, nor dear old Barnes, the miller! (runs over to BARNES)

BARNES. Hamiable hinfant! I feels a tear a moistening my manly heye.

MOUNT. (with much stateliness) Miss Ellen Mountsorrel, I call upon you to accompany your lawful parents immediately.

NELLY. (breaking away from them) Then you'll have to catch me first. *Runs out c. off R.*

MOUNT. (running after her) Nelly, do you hear, miss? I command you to— *Exit running after her, c. off R.*

CHICK. (sentimentally) This shows what pains I've taken with her bringings up. I'd no idea I was so fond o' the little creetur. (crosses to L.)

Re-enter MOUNTSORREL out of breath, c.

MRS. M. (*anxiously*) Where's Nelly!

MOUNT. (*gasping for breath*) She's up—

MRS. M. (*hurriedly*) Up—up what?

MOUNT. Up a tree!

MRS. M. (*astounded*) Up a tree!!!

CHICK. } (*bursting into a hoarse laugh*) Ho, ho, ho!
BARNES. }

MRS. M. (*running to window*) Yes, there she is! (*calling*) Nelly, come down, miss! (*to MOUNTSORREL*) What is to be done!

MOUNT. I'm sure I don't know, my dear. Not happening to be a climber myself, I am powerless in the matter. Stay—I have it! There's only one course left us—the child won't leave her nurse—the nurse must come with the child!

CHICK. (*aside*) What, all the way to Lunnun in petticoats.

MOUNT. (*to CHICKWEED*) Mysterious female! we offer you a confidential situation in the bosom of our family circle.

CHICK. } Well I never!
BARNES. }

CHICK. (*aside*) I hope's I shan't be expected to hofficiate as lady's maid!

MOUNT. Here, Nelly, you're nurse is coming with us. (*aside to his wife*) It's an unpleasant necessity, but there's no help for it. Don't be jealous, my dear.

Re-enter NELLY, c., with bird's nest.

NELLY. Hooray! I've got a bird's nest with six eggs!

MRS. M. Never mind bird's nests, Nelly, but put on your things—don't you hear? Your nurse is coming with us.

NELLY. Oh, if Nursey Chickweed's coming, I'll come too; but I say, nursey, you're not going out in these things? Here, take that old cap off!

(*Pulls cap-string—cap falls off, carrying with it the false front, so that CHICKWEED remains bareheaded and thoroughly discovered.*)

MRS. M. (*screaming*) Goodness gracious! look there.

MOUNT. Bless my soul! how's this? Why the nurse and her husband are the same individual! Incomprehensible being, where's your wife?

CHICK. (*horribly confused*) I—I am my wife! No, I'm my husband! No—I mean—oh dear! oh dear!—the fact is, I arn't got no wife!

MOUNT. You haven't got a wife?

CHICK. (*blubbering*) No, she heloped with a sodger when little Nelly was only just turned two. I durs'n't say nothink about it, for fear they should take the little un away. (*whispering*.) I didn't go for to do it!

MOUNT. Well, we have ourselves to blame for this. However, you have evidently treated the child with kindness and affection, and therefore, to save her the pain which a total separation would evidently cost her, I offer you the situation of governess—no, gardener I mean—in our family.

BARNES. Gardener in a gen'l'man's family! what a stroke o' luck!

CHICK. (*overjoyed*). Hooray! Then I shan't be parted from my little Nelly arter all! I say, Barnes, you may cry the watch and seals yourself, for I resigns my hoffice; but before I retires from public life I've one more 'nouncement to make. (*takes up bell, and gives the three professional short rings*) O yes! Oh yes! O yes! This here's to give notice as how Muster Jonathan Chickweed declines takin' any more juwenile hinfants to nuss—the dooties o' the callin' bein' one too many for him. (*to audience*) But mind you now, if ever you want a' hint about the trainin' o' the young hidea—

NELLY. (*interrupting him*) Or a lesson in the art of bring up young ladies in the ornamental style of which I am a specimen, just give us a look in—you know where to find us, and no one will be more delighted to give you the benefit of his professional experience than—

CHICK. AND NELLY. (*together*) NURSEY CHICKWEED!

MRS. M.	MR. M.	CHICK.	NELLY.	BARNES.
R.				L.