

MASTER HUMPHREY'S CLOCK

## PUBLIC LIFE OF MR TULRUMBLE, ONCE MAYOR OF MUDFOG

Mudfog is a pleasant town – a remarkably pleasant town – situated in a charming hollow by the side of a river, from which river, Mudfog derives an agreeable scent of pitch, tar, coals, and rope-yarn, a roving population in oil-skin hats, a pretty steady influx of drunken bargemen, and a great many other maritime advantages. There is a good deal of water about Mudfog, and yet it is not exactly the sort of town for a watering-place,<sup>1</sup> either. Water is a perverse sort of element at the best of times, and in Mudfog it is particularly so. In winter, it comes oozing down the streets and tumbling over the fields, – nay, rushes into the very cellars and kitchens of the houses, with a lavish prodigality that might well be dispensed with; but in the hot summer weather it *will* dry up, and turn green: and, although green is a very good colour in its way, especially in grass, still it certainly is not becoming to water; and it cannot be denied that the beauty of Mudfog is rather impaired, even by this trifling circumstance. Mudfog is a healthy place – very healthy; – damp, perhaps, but none the worse for that. It's quite a mistake to suppose that damp is unwholesome: plants thrive best in damp situations, and why shouldn't men? The inhabitants of Mudfog are unanimous in asserting that there exists not a finer race of people on the face of the earth; here we have an indisputable and veracious contradiction of the vulgar error at once. So, admitting Mudfog to be damp, we distinctly state that it is salubrious.

The town of Mudfog is extremely picturesque. Limehouse<sup>2</sup> and Ratcliffe Highway<sup>3</sup> are both something like it, but they give you a very faint idea of Mudfog. There are a great many more public-houses in Mudfog, – more than in Ratcliffe Highway and Limehouse put together. The public buildings, too, are very imposing. We consider the Town-hall one of the finest specimens of shed architecture, extant: it is a combination of the pig-sty and tea-garden-box, orders; and the simplicity of its design is of surpassing beauty. The idea of placing a large window on one

side of the door, and a small one on the other, is particularly happy. There is a fine bold Doric<sup>4</sup> beauty, too, about the padlock and scraper, which is strictly in keeping with the general effect.

In this room do the mayor and corporation of Mudfog assemble together in solemn council for the public weal. Seated on the massive wooden benches, which, with the table in the centre, form the only furniture of the whitewashed apartment, the sage men of Mudfog spend hour after hour in grave deliberation. Here they settle at what hour of the night the public-houses shall be closed, at what hour of the morning they shall be permitted to open, how soon it shall be lawful for people to eat their dinner on church-days,<sup>5</sup> and other great political questions; and sometimes, long after silence has fallen on the town, and the distant lights from the shops and houses have ceased to twinkle, like far-off stars, to the sight of the boatmen on the river, the illumination in the two unequal-sized windows of the town-hall, warns the inhabitants of Mudfog that its little body of legislators, like a larger and better-known body of the same genus,<sup>6</sup> a great deal more noisy, and not a whit more profound, are patriotically dozing away in company, far into the night, for their country's good.

Among this knot of sage and learned men, no one was so eminently distinguished, during many years, for the quiet modesty of his appearance and demeanour, as Nicholas Tulrumble, the well-known coal-dealer. However exciting the subject of discussion, however animated the tone of the debate, or however warm the personalities exchanged, (and even in Mudfog we get personal sometimes,) Nicholas Tulrumble was always the same. To say truth, Nicholas, being an industrious man, and always up betimes,<sup>7</sup> was apt to fall asleep when a debate began, and to remain asleep till it was over, when he would wake up very much refreshed, and give his vote with the greatest complacency. The fact was, that Nicholas Tulrumble, knowing that everybody there had made up his mind beforehand, considered the talking as just a long botheration about nothing at all; and to the present hour it remains a question, whether, on this point at all events, Nicholas Tulrumble was not pretty near right.

Time, which strews<sup>8</sup> a man's head with silver, sometimes fills his pockets with gold. As he gradually performed one good office for Nicholas Tulrumble, he was obliging enough not to

omit the other. Nicholas began life in a wooden tenement of four feet square, with a capital<sup>9</sup> of two and ninepence, and a stock in trade of three bushels<sup>10</sup> and a-half of coals, exclusive of the large lump which hung, by way of sign-board,<sup>11</sup> outside. Then he enlarged the shed, and kept a truck;<sup>12</sup> then he left the shed, and the truck too, and started a donkey<sup>13</sup> and a Mrs Tulrumbles; then he moved again and set up a cart; the cart was soon afterwards exchanged for a waggon;<sup>14</sup> and so he went on, like his great predecessor Whittington<sup>15</sup> – only without a cat for a partner – increasing in wealth and fame, until at last he gave up business altogether, and retired with Mrs Tulrumbles and family to Mudfog Hall, which he had himself erected, on something which he endeavoured to delude himself into the belief was a hill, about a quarter of a mile distant from the town of Mudfog.

About this time, it began to be murmured in Mudfog, that Nicholas Tulrumbles was growing vain and haughty; that prosperity and success had corrupted the simplicity of his manners, and tainted the natural goodness of his heart; in short, that he was setting up for a public character, and a great gentleman, and affected to look down upon his old companions with compassion and contempt. Whether these reports were at the time well-founded, or not, certain it is that Mrs Tulrumbles very shortly afterwards started a four-wheel chaise, driven by a tall postilion<sup>16</sup> in a yellow cap, – that Mr Tulrumbles junior took to smoking cigars, and calling the footman a ‘feller’ – and that Mr Tulrumbles from that time forth, was no more seen in his old seat in the chimney-corner of the Lighterman’s Arms<sup>17</sup> at night. This looked bad; but, more than this, it began to be observed that Mr Nicholas Tulrumbles attended the corporation meetings more frequently than heretofore; that he no longer went to sleep as he had done for so many years, but propped his eyelids open with his two fore-fingers; that he read the newspapers by himself at home; and that he was in the habit of indulging abroad in distant and mysterious allusions to ‘masses of people,’ and ‘the property of the country,’ and ‘productive power,’ and ‘the monied interest,’ all of which denoted and proved that Nicholas Tulrumbles was either mad, or worse; and it puzzled the good people of Mudfog amazingly.

At length, about the middle of the month of October, Mr Tulrumbles and family went up to London; the middle of

October being, as Mrs Tulrumble informed her acquaintance in Mudfog, the very height of the fashionable season.

Somehow or other, just about this time, despite the health-preserving air of Mudfog, the Mayor died. It was a most extraordinary circumstance; he had lived in Mudfog for eighty-five years. The corporation didn't understand it at all; indeed it was with great difficulty that one old gentleman, who was a great stickler for forms, was dissuaded from proposing a vote of censure on such unaccountable conduct. Strange as it was, however, die he did, without taking the slightest notice of the corporation; and the corporation were imperatively called upon to elect his successor. So, they met for the purpose; and being very full of Nicholas Tulrumble just then, and Nicholas Tulrumble being a very important man, they elected him, and wrote off to London by the very next post to acquaint Nicholas Tulrumble with his new elevation.

Now, it being November time, and Mr Nicholas Tulrumble being in the capital, it fell out that he was present at the Lord Mayor's show<sup>18</sup> and dinner, at sight of the glory and splendour whereof, he, Mr Tulrumble, was greatly mortified, inasmuch as the reflection would force itself on his mind, that, had he been born in London instead of in Mudfog, he might have been a Lord Mayor too, and have patronised the judges, and been affable to the Lord Chancellor, and friendly with the Premier, and coldly condescending to the Secretary to the Treasury, and have dined with a flag behind his back, and done a great many other acts and deeds which unto Lord Mayors of London peculiarly appertain. The more he thought of the Lord Mayor, the more enviable a personage he seemed. To be a King was all very well; but what was the King to the Lord Mayor! When the King made a speech, everybody knew it was somebody else's writing; whereas here was the Lord Mayor, talking away for half an hour – all out of his own head – amidst the enthusiastic applause of the whole company, while it was notorious that the King might talk to his parliament till he was black in the face without getting so much as a single cheer. As all these reflections passed through the mind of Mr Nicholas Tulrumble, the Lord Mayor of London appeared to him the greatest sovereign on the face of the earth, beating the Emperor of Russia all to nothing, and leaving the Great Mogul<sup>19</sup> immeasurably behind.

Mr Nicholas Tulrumble was pondering over these things, and