

PARKS FOR THE PEOPLE.

A TALE OF A KITE.

WE never *saw* the want there is of open places for the recreation of the people (the young people especially, in preference to the old), as when passing over Waterloo Bridge a few evenings since. In the recess of the centre arch, we beheld a genteel lad holding hard, as seamen say, to a short thick stick with both hands, with one foot planted firmly against the parapet, in resistance of some unseen power which pulled as though it would pull him over, and plunge him in the waters below. Surprised to see a young gentleman "in the morning of life, ere passion takes the reason prisoner," in so unaccountable an attitude, we set ourselves curiously to discover what he could be about, besides being about thirteen, and about as ingenious-looking a lad as we have seen anywhere in a circle of five miles' radius, with Lad-lane for its centre. From the stick we then observed there ran a string; and up that string a circular piece of paper, such as in our *Juvenal* days was called a

messenger ; and following it up, and up, and up, till our eyes tracked it up the fourth of a mile high, we saw, suspended in mid air, a kite of gigantic size, such as any young gentleman would give five shillings for, and think it not a groat too dear. Fluctuating from side to side, like Mr. Wakley between Sir Robert and Lord John, now inclining a little to the Surrey side of things, and now to the Middlesex, on the whole it maintained its altitude pretty well, considering that the wind was as undecided as itself, and ran about to all quarters. Now, like O'Connell, it mounted : now, like him, it plunged headlong downwards : anon it recovered itself, and rose again, steadied, like him, by its tail. A hundred other comparisons, political and poetical, were suggested to us, while we stood admiring its flight, which it would be tedious to mention.

Pleased with the more than average London ingenuity of the lad in availing himself of the only open space within a mile or two, and pleased as well with his affable manners, and his frank bearing (which led us, by a process of association known only to punsters and persons with their wits about them, to think of another sort of Frank Baring not half so ingenious) as he answered our question *why* he selected such a spot for his sport, we paid him the silent compliment of thinking that, with his talent for expediency, he would, by

as he was, make a better Chancellor of the Exchequer, and hit on happier means, if not to raise the wind, to make use of it for his purposes; and then went our way, rejoicing that we had picked up a truly primitive proof of London, or Town, or Cockney ingenuity, call it which you will, such as is not to be fallen in with every day in the week; nor is it every idle blockhead's business to see it and take note of it, though it may lie under his very nose.

But, as we are on the financial subject of kite-flying, and have told one anecdote (to the point) touching it, we may as well, while we are in the humour, tell another; and here you have it.

Strolling over Wandsworth Common a short time since, we observed in a corner of that wide waste a solitary donkey; no uncommon sight to be seen on a common, it will be said: true; but this donkey was seen under uncommon circumstances, as we shall relate. Before we came up to him we had been puzzling our little wit to account for a large kite floating high in the air in that open spot, without the usual accompaniment to a kite—a boy at one end of it, to conduct its ascent and descent. We looked all over the long, level flat, and, as Pat would say, devil a boy was there there to be seen anyhow; not even the whistle or whoop of a boy to tell us of the whereabouts of one. Much marvelled we at this miracle of an effect seemingly

without a cause, as we went leisurely towards the spot over which the kite was hovering. But shortly a light broke in on our darkness. It was the donkey we had seen, and no soul else, ["Has a negro a soul, your honour?" asked Corporal Trim,] that was flying the kite!!—Here the Reader, whether gentle or simple, will stare, and shake his head incredulously, and, in humble imitation of the bad manners of a certain debating society, cry "*Oh! Oh!*" Now, the Reader may shake his head, if he will, till his teeth rattle like dice in a box; and still he will not shake the fact, that a donkey was seen, and by a veritable witness, flying a kite on Wandsworth Common in the ever-memorable year 1841—if memorable for nothing else, for that; and very well he did it too, albeit unused to the *flying* mood, and to our extreme satisfaction, if not to his. The greatest wonder in this wonderful world is but a commonplace when explained. Here we hear cries of "Explain! Explain!" "Who ever saw a donkey flying a kite?" We have already said we did. "How came a donkey to be flying a kite?" We will tell you how. Why, marry, thus.

Sam Snaffle, (for we were curious enough to inquire the name of the ingenious young person we are about to introduce to the reader,) of Lower Tooting, a little village in the neighbourhood, was, it seems, the proprietor of said kite. Sir Isaac,

the donkey, was, on the other hand, the whole and sole property of Sam Snaffle, senior. Sir Isaac being entitled, through his owner, to the right of free commonage, was sent on the common accordingly for an afternoon's grazing, Sam the younger being his guide and conductor on the occasion. Not to lose time, and to have his pleasure as well as Sir Isaac, Sam took his large-paper tall-copy of a kite with him, that, while the one stuck to the earth earthy, the other might hold some converse with the skies. Having loosened Sir Isaac's body-girth, that he might get a bellyful of the sweet short grass thereabouts without hurting his button-holes, he next let out the string of his kite, (and there was plenty of it,) and away the paper currency mounted into thin air. It was when it was thus "flying all abroad," at the very top of its tether, that Sam, for some unknown purpose or other, felt all about him for his knife, and felt it not—not nowhere, as he expressed its entire absence. Where was it? Ay, where indeed? He remembered now that he had used it as he turned out of Obligation-lane, which runs into the common, to cut a swish for Sir Isaac, should he want it; and there he had dropped it, he feared. Every man who has been a boy in his time (and most men go through that preliminary process) must remember how dear a thing to a boy is *his* knife and nobody else's. With his kite a quarter-mile high,

and an hour's work to bring it down and wind it in again—his knife a mile off—how was Sam to run back to Obligation-lane, and recover it, before any one passing that way could pick it up? There was the rub! Here was a fix! He looked round him: there was not a tree, a tree-stump, a bush of any bulk, an old post, or a good lump of a stone on the bare common, to which he could tie his kite while he ran back to find what was lost. There was nothing there but Sir Isaac and himself, three sparrows, a cuckoo in a corner somewhere, a lark hovering overhead, and his kite, to be seen anywhere, and these were all particularly and privately engaged. Sir Isaac was whisking his tail, at the moment, as a general warning to a dragon-fly which had been buzzing about him for some time as though he meant to settle an old account with him, and open a new one. "That's it!" cried Sam, slapping his young thigh, with a shout of exultation at the happy thought; and as Napoleon used to say when he was grandiloquent, it was the work of no time at all to give the kite-string half-a-dozen turns round the tail of Sir Isaac just above its tufty end, tie it in a knot, and leave the high-flyer to his management for a quarter of an hour at the most, which time it would take him to run back and return from Obligation-lane.

It was towards the termination of this inter-regnum that we chanced, as Humanity would have

it, to come up to Sir Isaac in all the assinine agonies of his trusteeship: for, poor fellow, being no philosopher, no Franklin making novel experiments, he could not understand what was the matter with him—what had hold of him by the tail, and was lugging and tugging him this way and that way—and how to act for the best. He had kicked till he was tired of kicking the air only, and gave that up as unprofitable. He had tried all sorts of ways to get rid of the entail: had run round in short circles till he was giddy; rolled over and over on the ground till he was worse; pitched head and stern; but in none of these ways could he shake off the horrible incubus behind. If he had ever heard of the bereavement of Tam o' Shanter's mare Maggie, Sir Isaac would have prayed to be so docked, and never-minded the singularity of his after-appearance among his own circle. At last, wearied with vain efforts, he ratted from opposition, and let the kite lift him up by the tail, as *it* kicked now, and not he, till at times he was fairly off his legs behind, and on his nose before. The wind then swelling almost to a hurricane, he could stand it no longer; and so, as well he might, he took to as many heels as he could get to the ground at one time, and bolted to the opposite corner of the common. There there were, fortunately, a few trees; and there, the wind being as rude as ever, and his tail lugged and tugged till

it was numbed with the torture, with an intelligence which does not fall to the lot of one ass in a thousand, that he might not be borne away up to the second heaven, when next

“The wind blew as ’twad blawn its last,”

—it struck him as a happy thought, and it was, and no sooner thought than done—he incontinently clapped his forelegs roundabout the stem of a sturdy sapling, and held on like a tailor at the Epping hunting till it blew over. Now this was not a bad thought, as far as it went. But, if Sir Isaac was so named by his sponsors in memory of a certain sage philosopher, he should have thought within himself, “What would the author of the *Principia* have done in like circumstances?” and gone on improving upon his first conceptions. Sir Isaac the Great, in such a dilemma, absent as he was in his habits, would have had presence of mind enough to have walked twice or thrice round the trunk of the tree, coiling the kite-string by this means roundabout its bole, and have left it to bear the tugs and lugs

“Which patient merit of the unworthy takes,”

and not have been responsible one moment longer than he could help it for an acceptance so irregularly drawn and improperly indorsed. But to return to our story.

From afar we had beheld Sir Isaac cutting the extraordinary capers we have been describing, and

had set them down as freaks of an antic disposition—merry moods of a mind not always so happy. It was in this critical position of affairs that we leisurely came up to him, and found him head downwards—heels up—and his tail perpendicularly erected, like unto the handles of certain parish pumps by roadsides against which passengers bump their noses. Wondering to see any animal, and especially one of his sedate race, in so ludicrous a plight, as soon as we could for laughing, (and surely it would have moved the crying philosopher to mirth to have beheld him!) conjecturing that it was the wicked trick of some young wags ambushed somewhere thereabouts and enjoying the joke, we untied the string, now as tight as a tourniquet, set him free, and took the management of the kite into our own hands. The poor beast shook himself, and, turning one look upon us—such a look!—with his lacklustre eyes, seemed to thank us, how gratefully! Oh surely, only a distressed author, made able, by the unlooked-for aid of some true friend, to take up a bill overdue and noted, could have given such a look! It was a look which came from his heart if it came from anywhere, and so entered readily into ours, always wide open to such angels' visits.

We had not had charge of this unusual ward for us, as well as Sir Ikey, more than five minutes, and, as we knew not what else to do with it, were

winding it in, when we heard the quick beating of hasty feet over the hollow ground; and in a few moments, puffing, blowing, and broiling red in the face with hot running, up comes a boy with the cry of "That's my kite, please, Sir!" Well, perhaps it was: we could not deny it: we granted it: we did not, we could not, dispute it: we knew it was not ours: men who *fly kites* mostly know their own paper. We made signs of not unwillingly wishing to avoid any further responsibilities. "Oh," said Sam, (for it was he—graciously deeming, no doubt, that it must be a treat, a great indulgence, even to hold and not to have a kite of such lofty pretensions as a quarter-mile high,) "Oh, I'm in no hurry, Sir!" said he; "Oh no: you may fly it as long as you like, Sir; only hold it in, Sir!" We bowed, and were certainly obliged to so trusting a young person. A very churl could not have refused so handsome an offer, so *naïvely* tendered, with so generous a desire for our amusement as an old boy who had not the look of having quite forgotten that he was once a young one, and once delighted in the flight Franklinian as well as the rest and the best. We held on accordingly a little longer, till, as the wind was high, and the kite tugged like a tar at a tiller-rope, it was not half so amusing as it seemed to be. "Don't it tug, neither?" quoth Sam, exulting in its strength. Though we made no answer, either to the tune

that it did or that it did not tug, he was pleased gratuitously to say, "I believe yer! But then it's such a *one-r*—such a rummy, plummy one!" Studious of these encomiastic (?) expressions—ashamed to confess our ignorance of their import, and ask for a rendering of them into the every-day vernacular—we believe that, in our abstraction, we might have held the kite somewhat awkwardly, as though we held it not, and were not alive to our serious responsibilities. Seeing this, Sam very considerably, but somewhat impatiently, we thought, took all further charge of it out of our incompetent hands; and, running off with it before the wind, left Sir Isaac and ourselves to our ruminations as before.

Great is the glorious privilege of youth!—so great, indeed, that it ought never to be taken away from those who enjoy it, but be theirs to the end, or until they are thoroughly tired of it, and, not wisely, wish to be a "man, and leave off childish things."