

**A FEW ODD  
CHARACTERS OUT OF  
THE LONDON STREETS**

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A Few Odd Characters Out of the London Streets by Henry Mayhew

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**HENRY MAYHEW**

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A FEW  
ODD CHARACTERS

OUT OF THE  
LONDON STREETS,

AS REPRESENTED IN  
MR. HENRY MAYHEW'S

*Curious Conversations.*

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1857.

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**PART FIRST.**

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## THE LONDON COSTERMONGER.

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*Enter COSTERMONGER, guiding a Donkey-Barrow laden with Turnips, Carrots, Cabbages, Peas, Asparagus, &c.*

Hi! hi! hi! Look at this here! Now then, vomen! vomen! come along, vomen. Here's your lillyvite turnips!—Kem erp! Hoorore for free-trade! Lillyvyite tu-urnyup woh! A penny a markyut bunch, tu-urnyup woh! They're stunning good b'ilers, Mary! [*addressing some woman in the pit*] I should say they vos and all too; and 'ud do prime-oh, vith a nice leg—just sitch a von, my dear, as I seed yer a-stepping over the crossing vith t'other day. A penny a markyut bunch woh!  
[*Turning suddenly round.*]

Vell my sevells, how d'ye bring it in by this time?  
[*Sits on the end of the barrow and takes out his pipe and tobacco, which he proceeds to smoke as he talks.*]

I told the guv'nor I'd come round some morning and have a talk about our chaps; so here I is, ye see, vith my p'ramb'lator.

Vot d'ye think o' this here hanimal my kenobs, [*patting the donkey.*] Some of you ought to be able to tell a fust-rate hass ven ye sees him, and I a'n't conceited, but I hopes I knows myself vot's a thorough-going hass too. He's the reel Britanny metal, I can tell yer—and for all the vorld like von of them there seveet ere'bars

in petticoats; them—ye know,—as “may be led but you’n be druv.” D’ye tumble to the barrikin, eh?

[*Spits through his teeth and passes his hand under the spittle as it falls.*]

Oh, he’s a regular beauty he is! As seveet-tempered too as a Scriptur-reader, and knows every plug-hole from the New Cut to Billingsgate. Ve never falls out! Ever since I’ve had him, there a’n’t never been no difference bechuxt us. I feeds him on the werry best —[*shouting*].—Fine ripe gra-ass yah! To me yah!—Sparrer-gra-ass yah!

Yes, the Costers is all fond of a moke. Vell, a moke’s a hass, if ye must know.

[SERVANT brings on a glass of gin on a waiter.

The COSTER takes the glass, on its being handed to him, and saying “Here’s fortun’! I looks to’ards yer!” he tosses off the liquor at one gulp, and then wipes his mouth with his cuff, adding, “They might ha’ vetted the t’other heye, vile they vos about it!”]

Our chaps mostly talks vot’s called “kab genals.” Vot on airth’s “kab genals,” d’ye say? Vell, I never! I thought you *did* know the price of old rags! Vy “kab genals” is on’y the vords “back slang” showed right back’ards. Don’t ye see. A’n’t *c a b* the back’ards for “back,” and isn’t “genals” the topsy-turvy for “slang.” Oh! you a’n’t half fly.

Blind me! if that there drop o’ short ha’n’t rubbed up my pecker like a Bath brick. I’ve got a buster and a bloodworm somevare about me, so I’ll just have a snack, vith yer leave.

[*He feels in his pockets, and at last pulls out a penny loaf and a small black pudding, which he commences eating with his clasp-knife.*]

In the “kab-genals” patter, ye see, all the vords is pernounced as if they vos spelled wrong-end fust. Like *this here now*—“Tuc ti” is the back-slang for “cut



it;" and this is the way ve does the reck'ning up in that there kind o' talk. So keep your heyes vide open, for I'm a-going over the numbers just like a crab would, ye know—back'ards.

Eno, otc, erth, rofe, evif, exis, neves, t-h-guy, enin, net, nevel, clewt, erth-net, rofe-net, evif-net, exis-net, neves-net, t-h-guy-net, enin-net, doonup—that's a pound, or twenty bob, ye know.

But you ought to be "pu to the kalat," or as the flatties 'ud say, "up to the talk," by this time.

A penny ve calls a "yennep,"—a shilling is a "ginil-lihs,"—and a half-crown a "flatch-enorc." For "I've got no money," ve says "I tog on yenom;" and for "look at the policeman," "kool the esilopnam." A pot of beer, is "a top o' reeb" in our lingo; a glass of gin or rum ve dubs "a slag o' nig or mur;" and if you vos to ax me vot fammerley I'd got, vy, instead of telling on ye as I'd "three boys and two gals besides the old 'ooman at home," I should say in reg'lar coster there vos "erth yobs and otc elrigs besides the delo namow at emotch."

But on'y to think o' my having to give you a lesson in 'arning! A'n't your eddication been neglected though, that's all!

[Returns to his barrow and begins cleaning the scoop of his scales.]

But ve costers has got another kind o' slang besides a slang language, and that's [*whispering*] slang veights and measures. Vell, this here is vot I calls a slang veight. A'n't slang flash now? Werry well! And a'n't a flash a great light? Werry well! Then, ye see, a slang veight's a flash veight, and a flash veight's a great light veight. D'ye brown to the salve now, eh?

Many of our coves used to have their veights beat out flat till they looked as big as muffins. But the people at last tumbled to that racket, so some of the costers has took to cork veights. Ah, you may open

your mince-pies, my toolips ! but I says cork veights, and means cork veights too.

[*Looks round cautiously, and then takes a "dummy" weight from his pocket.*]

Ye see [*in a whisper*] the veights is made holler, and is filled up hinside vith a big bung. Folks do tell a story, that vonce-te, ven the veights of a vet-fish cove down by the docks vos seized and chuckt into the river, they axully—vot d'ye think?—vy they axully floated down the stream.

[*He puts the dummy weight hastily back into his pocket.*]

Ve all on 'us vould vork skevare though if we could ; but the vomen gets so scaly now-a-days, they vants a pound for the price of a half-pound, and so ve tips 'em the "fatch-doonup" for the "doonup," ye know.

Now then, ladies ! come along and have yer fool's measure ! All young peas and fresh-gither'd ! Fresh gither'd peas sixpunce yah pyeck ! To me yah ! sixpunce yah pyeck !—Vell, if things goes on this vay, I shall have to sell the moke o' Friday.

[*Begins to tidy his barrow, and picks out the yellow peas, which he puts in a heap by themselves.*]

Yes, in coorse ve has our tricks o' trade too, as vell as the reg'lar shopkeepers—that's vot's called the pushing system, ye know. Every von's a pushing von again the t'other in these here henterprising times—and a nice pretty smash up it'll all end in some day, take my word for it. Vy the banks breaks now just as heasy as fresh carrots.

[*Takes a carrot off the barrow and twists it round and round without breaking it, exclaiming—*"Oh, I forgot ! them's a veek hold if they's a day!"—*and then shouts,* "Here's yer lillyvite tu-urnyups and fine fresh carurts, woh !" Carurts, Ma'am ! they vos a-growing yesterday,—[*To the donkey*]*—*Kevi-ert ! This here chap can't a-bear to know I'm a-selling on 'em. Kevi-ert ! Didn't I give yer a

breakfast, and how am I to pay the hint'rest on the sovereign I borrrer'd if ye don't vork as vell as me!]

Then as for yer "Marchint Princes," vy they a'n't no better than *cork veights* arter all. They looks big and solid enough to be sure, but ven ye comes to turn 'em up, ye finds they're stuffed up on'y vith paper in place of the reel substarntial metal. A'n't a seat in Parliament too, since these here British Bank disclosures, come to be just like a seat on my donkey?—a very duberous persition; and von vitch makes a many a clever chap appear but little above a hass.

Do *ve* black-lead the tea, let me ax yer?—or mix burnt cable with the korphy? His it hus vot saltwaters the porter, or puts brains in the milk, or dead cats in the potted meats, or werdigreases the pickles?—[*folding his arms*]—I waits for a reply. No! *Ve* only blows out the cod-fish—plugs the coker-nuts—and b'iles the horanges, that's all.

Some pricks the "suckers" (that's our vord for horanges), and then skeveedges out every drop of juice, vitch they sells to the British Vine Fabricators; and arter that they b'iles the dry fruit, so as to plump 'em out again. The people though can't find out that the suckers is as dry inside as a devil's snuff-box, till they digs their teeth in 'em—and [*putting his thumb to his nose*] that's too late, ye know.

Now this here horange [*taking a boiled one off the barrow*] is like the British Bank, my kiddies. To judge from the outside on it, ye'd think it were a solid lump of goold. But just rip it up like this here [*cutting it open*], and you'll find that some rogue has been there afore yer, and drawn all the substance out on it. [*Shouting*] Seveet Chany! four a penny here, seveet Chany horanges!

[*Proceeds to "gaff" with himself at one corner of the barrow, crying*] "Vot I loves best—Voman," etc.