



# Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

## Our Vestry

*Charles Dickens*

We have the glorious privilege of being always in hot water if we like. We are a shareholder in a Great Parochial British Joint Stock Bank of Balderdash. We have a Vestry in our borough, and can vote for a vestryman - might even BE a vestryman, mayhap, if we were inspired by a lofty and noble ambition. Which we are not.

Our Vestry is a deliberative assembly of the utmost dignity and importance. Like the Senate of ancient Rome, its awful gravity overpowers (or ought to overpower) barbarian visitors. It sits in the Capitol (we mean in the capital building erected for it), chiefly on Saturdays, and shakes the earth to its centre with the echoes of its thundering eloquence, in a Sunday paper.

To get into this Vestry in the eminent capacity of Vestryman, gigantic efforts are made, and Herculean exertions used. It is made manifest to the dulllest capacity at every election, that if we reject Snuzzle we are done for, and that if we fail to bring in Blunderbooze at the top of the poll, we are unworthy of the dearest rights of Britons. Flaming placards are rife on all the dead walls in the borough, public-houses hang out banners, hackney-cabs burst into full-grown flowers of type, and everybody is, or should be, in a paroxysm of anxiety.

At these momentous crises of the national fate, we are much assisted in our deliberations by two eminent volunteers; one of whom subscribes himself A Fellow Parishioner, the other, A Rate- Payer. Who they are, or what they are, or where they are, nobody knows; but, whatever one asserts, the other contradicts. They are both voluminous writers, indicting more epistles than Lord Chesterfield in a single week; and the greater part of their feelings are too big for utterance in anything less than capital letters. They require the additional aid of whole rows of notes of admiration, like balloons, to point their generous indignation; and they sometimes communicate a crushing severity to stars. As thus:

MEN OF MOONEYMOUNT.

Is it, or is it not, a \* \* \* to saddle the parish with a debt of 2,745 pounds 6S. 9D., yet claim to be a RIGID ECONOMIST?

Is it, or is it not, a \* \* \* to state as a fact what is proved to be BOTH A MORAL

AND A PHYSICAL IMPOSSIBILITY?

Is it, or is it not, a \* \* \* to call 2,745 pounds 6S. 9D. nothing; and nothing, something?

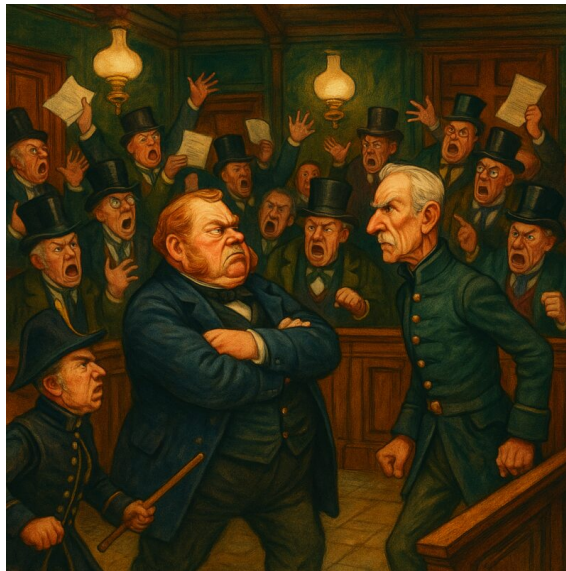
Do you, or do you NOT want a \* \* \* TO REPRESENT YOU IN THE VESTRY?

Your consideration of these questions is recommended to you by

A FELLOW PARISHIONER.

It was to this important public document that one of our first orators, MR. MAGG (of Little Winkling Street), adverted, when he opened the great debate of the fourteenth of November by saying, 'Sir, I hold in my hand an anonymous slander' - and when the interruption, with which he was at that point assailed by the opposite faction, gave rise to that memorable discussion on a point of order which will ever be remembered with interest by constitutional assemblies. In the animated debate to which we refer, no fewer than thirty-seven gentlemen, many of them of great eminence, including MR. WIGSBY (of Chumbledon Square), were seen upon their legs at one time; and it was on the same great occasion that DOGGINSON - regarded in our Vestry as 'a regular John Bull:' we believe, in consequence of his having always made up his mind on every subject without knowing anything about it - informed another gentleman of similar principles on the opposite side, that if he 'cheek'd him,' he would resort to the extreme measure of knocking his blessed head off.

This was a great occasion. But, our Vestry shines habitually. In asserting its own pre-eminence, for instance, it is very strong. On the least provocation, or on none, it will be clamorous to know whether it is to be 'dictated to,' or 'trampled on,' or 'ridden over rough-shod.' Its great watchword is Self-government. That is to say, supposing our Vestry to favour any little harmless disorder like Typhus Fever, and supposing the Government of the country to be, by any accident, in such ridiculous hands, as that any of its authorities should consider it a duty to object to Typhus Fever - obviously an unconstitutional objection - then, our Vestry cuts in with a terrible manifesto about Self-government, and claims its independent right to have as much Typhus Fever as pleases itself. Some absurd and dangerous persons have represented, on the other hand, that though our Vestry may be able to 'beat the bounds' of its own parish, it may not be able to beat the bounds of its own diseases; which (say they) spread over the whole land, in an ever expanding circle of waste, and misery, and death, and widowhood, and orphanage, and desolation. But, our Vestry makes short work of any such fellows as these.



It was our Vestry - pink of Vestries as it is - that in support of its favourite principle took the celebrated ground of denying the existence of the last pestilence that raged in England, when the pestilence was raging at the Vestry doors. Dogginson said it was plums; Mr. Wigsby (of Chumbledon Square) said it was oysters; Mr. Magg (of Little Winkling Street) said, amid great cheering, it was the newspapers. The noble indignation of our Vestry with that un- English institution the Board of Health, under those circumstances, yields one of the finest passages in its history. It wouldn't hear of rescue. Like Mr. Joseph Miller's Frenchman, it would be drowned and nobody should save it. Transported beyond grammar by its kindled ire, it spoke in unknown tongues, and vented unintelligible bellowings, more like an ancient oracle than the modern oracle it is admitted on all hands to be. Rare exigencies produce rare things; and even our Vestry, new hatched to the woful time, came forth a greater goose than ever.

But this, again, was a special occasion. Our Vestry, at more ordinary periods, demands its meed of praise.

Our Vestry is eminently parliamentary. Playing at Parliament is its favourite game. It is even regarded by some of its members as a chapel of ease to the House of Commons: a Little Go to be passed first. It has its strangers' gallery, and its reported debates (see the Sunday paper before mentioned), and our Vestrymen are in and out of order, and on and off their legs, and above all are transcendently quarrelsome, after the pattern of the real original.

Our Vestry being assembled, Mr. Magg never begs to trouble Mr. Wigsby with a simple inquiry. He knows better than that. Seeing the honourable gentleman, associated in their minds with Chumbledon Square, in his place, he wishes to ask that honourable gentleman what the intentions of himself, and those with whom he acts, may be, on the subject of the paving of the district known as Piggieum Buildings? Mr. Wigsby replies (with his eye on next Sunday's paper) that in reference to the question which has been put to him by the honourable

gentleman opposite, he must take leave to say, that if that honourable gentleman had had the courtesy to give him notice of that question, he (Mr. Wigsby) would have consulted with his colleagues in reference to the advisability, in the present state of the discussions on the new paving-rate, of answering that question. But, as the honourable gentleman has NOT had the courtesy to give him notice of that question (great cheering from the Wigsby interest), he must decline to give the honourable gentleman the satisfaction he requires. Mr. Magg, instantly rising to retort, is received with loud cries of 'Spoke!' from the Wigsby interest, and with cheers from the Magg side of the house. Moreover, five gentlemen rise to order, and one of them, in revenge for being taken no notice of, petrifies the assembly by moving that this Vestry do now adjourn; but, is persuaded to withdraw that awful proposal, in consideration of its tremendous consequences if persevered in. Mr. Magg, for the purpose of being heard, then begs to move, that you, sir, do now pass to the order of the day; and takes that opportunity of saying, that if an honourable gentleman whom he has in his eye, and will not demean himself by more particularly naming (oh, oh, and cheers), supposes that he is to be put down by clamour, that honourable gentleman - however supported he may be, through thick and thin, by a Fellow Parishioner, with whom he is well acquainted (cheers and counter-cheers, Mr. Magg being invariably backed by the Rate-Payer) - will find himself mistaken. Upon this, twenty members of our Vestry speak in succession concerning what the two great men have meant, until it appears, after an hour and twenty minutes, that neither of them meant anything. Then our Vestry begins business.

We have said that, after the pattern of the real original, our Vestry in playing at Parliament is transcendently quarrelsome. It enjoys a personal altercation above all things. Perhaps the most redoubtable case of this kind we have ever had - though we have had so many that it is difficult to decide - was that on which the last extreme solemnities passed between Mr. Tiddypot (of Gumption House) and Captain Banger (of Wilderness Walk).

In an adjourned debate on the question whether water could be regarded in the light of a necessary of life; respecting which there were great differences of opinion, and many shades of sentiment; Mr. Tiddypot, in a powerful burst of eloquence against that hypothesis, frequently made use of the expression that such and such a rumour had 'reached his ears.' Captain Banger, following him, and holding that, for purposes of ablution and refreshment, a pint of water per diem was necessary for every adult of the lower classes, and half a pint for every child, cast ridicule upon his address in a sparkling speech, and concluded by saying that instead of those rumours having reached the ears of the honourable gentleman, he rather thought the honourable gentleman's ears must have reached the rumours, in consequence of their well-known length. Mr. Tiddypot

immediately rose, looked the honourable and gallant gentleman full in the face, and left the Vestry.

The excitement, at this moment painfully intense, was heightened to an acute degree when Captain Banger rose, and also left the Vestry. After a few moments of profound silence - one of those breathless pauses never to be forgotten - Mr. Chib (of Tucket's Terrace, and the father of the Vestry) rose. He said that words and looks had passed in that assembly, replete with consequences which every feeling mind must deplore. Time pressed. The sword was drawn, and while he spoke the scabbard might be thrown away. He moved that those honourable gentlemen who had left the Vestry be recalled, and required to pledge themselves upon their honour that this affair should go no farther. The motion being by a general union of parties unanimously agreed to (for everybody wanted to have the belligerents there, instead of out of sight: which was no fun at all), Mr. Magg was deputed to recover Captain Banger, and Mr. Chib himself to go in search of Mr. Tiddypot. The Captain was found in a conspicuous position, surveying the passing omnibuses from the top step of the front-door immediately adjoining the beadle's box; Mr. Tiddypot made a desperate attempt at resistance, but was overpowered by Mr. Chib (a remarkably hale old gentleman of eighty- two), and brought back in safety.

Mr. Tiddypot and the Captain being restored to their places, and glaring on each other, were called upon by the chair to abandon all homicidal intentions, and give the Vestry an assurance that they did so. Mr. Tiddypot remained profoundly silent. The Captain likewise remained profoundly silent, saying that he was observed by those around him to fold his arms like Napoleon Buonaparte, and to snort in his breathing - actions but too expressive of gunpowder.

The most intense emotion now prevailed. Several members clustered in remonstrance round the Captain, and several round Mr. Tiddypot; but, both were obdurate. Mr. Chib then presented himself amid tremendous cheering, and said, that not to shrink from the discharge of his painful duty, he must now move that both honourable gentlemen be taken into custody by the beadle, and conveyed to the nearest police-office, there to be held to bail. The union of parties still continuing, the motion was seconded by Mr. Wigsby - on all usual occasions Mr. Chib's opponent - and rapturously carried with only one dissentient voice. This was Dogginson's, who said from his place 'Let 'em fight it out with fistes;' but whose coarse remark was received as it merited.

The beadle now advanced along the floor of the Vestry, and beckoned with his cocked hat to both members. Every breath was suspended. To say that a pin might have been heard to fall, would be feebly to express the all-absorbing interest and silence. Suddenly, enthusiastic cheering broke out from every side of the Vestry. Captain Banger had risen - being, in fact, pulled up by a friend on

either side, and poked up by a friend behind.

The Captain said, in a deep determined voice, that he had every respect for that Vestry and every respect for that chair; that he also respected the honourable gentleman of Gumpton House; but, that he respected his honour more. Hereupon the Captain sat down, leaving the whole Vestry much affected. Mr. Tiddypot instantly rose, and was received with the same encouragement. He likewise said - and the exquisite art of this orator communicated to the observation an air of freshness and novelty - that he too had every respect for that Vestry; that he too had every respect for that chair. That he too respected the honourable and gallant gentleman of Wilderness Walk; but, that he too respected his honour more. 'Hows'ever,' added the distinguished Vestryman, 'if the honourable and gallant gentleman's honour is never more doubted and damaged than it is by me, he's all right.' Captain Banger immediately started up again, and said that after those observations, involving as they did ample concession to his honour without compromising the honour of the honourable gentleman, he would be wanting in honour as well as in generosity, if he did not at once repudiate all intention of wounding the honour of the honourable gentleman, or saying anything dishonourable to his honourable feelings. These observations were repeatedly interrupted by bursts of cheers. Mr. Tiddypot retorted that he well knew the spirit of honour by which the honourable and gallant gentleman was so honourably animated, and that he accepted an honourable explanation, offered in a way that did him honour; but, he trusted that the Vestry would consider that his (Mr. Tiddypot's) honour had imperatively demanded of him that painful course which he had felt it due to his honour to adopt. The Captain and Mr. Tiddypot then touched their hats to one another across the Vestry, a great many times, and it is thought that these proceedings (reported to the extent of several columns in next Sunday's paper) will bring them in as church-wardens next year.

All this was strictly after the pattern of the real original, and so are the whole of our Vestry's proceedings. In all their debates, they are laudably imitative of the windy and wordy slang of the real original, and of nothing that is better in it. They have head-strong party animosities, without any reference to the merits of questions; they tack a surprising amount of debate to a very little business; they set more store by forms than they do by substances: - all very like the real original! It has been doubted in our borough, whether our Vestry is of any utility; but our own conclusion is, that it is of the use to the Borough that a diminishing mirror is to a painter, as enabling it to perceive in a small focus of absurdity all the surface defects of the real original.

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