

Aunt Keziak's Elopement

by Edmund Petley.

Illustrations by Hugh Thomson.



Uncle Jack, while warming his back, is reminded of the days when he met Aunt Keziak at Bath

It is Christmas Eve, and good Uncle Jack, With legs wide apart, is warming his back In front of a roaring fire, When Aunt Keziak appears on the scene, Remarking he makes an excellent screen, Though she fears he must perspire!

The Squire takes the hint and ambles aside; In a gap in our semi-circle wide He wedges his portly frame; Then some one suggests Aunt Kizzie should tell How she eloped when a volatile belle With uncle—her ardent flame.

Though we've all of us heard the tale before, Aunt Keziak consents to tell it once more; So beside her dear old man Smiling, she sits in her favorite chair, Her silver hair bright in the firelight's glare; And thus her narrative ran:

"You must know, my dears, I was seventeen, As dainty a lass as ever was seen— So your uncle would affirm— When my guardian took me to Bath to drink Chalybeate waters, tasting like ink— They're horrid and make one squirm.

'Twas the season's height: Dame Fashion's vain throng Of dandies and flirts who sauntered along Appealed to my foolish pride; For many a gay macaroni would wait On me, hand and foot, as I sat in state, My chaperon by my side.

"But of all my admirers there were two I favored the most; betwixt me and you The one was a country lad, A lover of dogs, good judge of a horse, With rustic manners, in no degree coarse, Though I thought his accent bad.

"The other, a top of the choicest blend, A scented exotic, the welcome friend Of each matrimonial dame; His splendor and wealth caused the constant throng Of the Pump-room clique—his coats were a dream, And Burlington was his name.



Whither she had gone with her guardian to take the waters

"So they fell in love with poor little me, Though why I can't tell; you all must agree That a simple, modest maid Could hardly expect to compete with those Adept at the art of conquering beaux, In a frivolous crusade.

"My languishing swains at a party met (They both belonged to a rather fast set), And over the wine that night Dick Burlington bragged he had won the heart Of 'that saucy baggage in Hymen's mart'— Which your uncle deemed a slight,

"So he flung a pack of cards in his face, And, his rage was such, was within an ace Of hurling a glass of port, When the other gentlemen interposed, And around the would-be combatants closed, Cutting the argument short.

But when Dick Burlington, at a card party, bragged of his conquest, Uncle Jack flung the cards in his face, and challenged him to a duel.



As a sequel to the duel the pair are separated by irate guardians, but love laughs at guardians and high confining walls.

"Devoutly I wished I'd never been born, When at th' assembly the following morn I received a dreadful shock; 'Twas rumored my lovers would fight a duel (How I marvelled that men could be so cruel!) On the hills at five o'clock.

"Unobserved I slipped from ballroom to street, And hurrying on, with tottering feet, At last reached the fatal spot; I pushed through a hedge, feeling like to choke, Heard two sharp reports, saw a haze of smoke, And there my brave Jack lay—shot!"



Bold Highwayman.

"His blushes I'll spare, and never betray The things that he said; suffice it to say He urged me for both our sakes To take French leave; till at last I agreed To elope to the land beyond the Tweed, So famous for kilts and cakes.

"One night, when the moon had begun to wane, A post-chaise drew up in a bosky lane Quite close to the garden gate, Through which I emerged, my lover's strong arm Encircling my waist, thus full of alarm Went I forth to meet my fate.



A coach was hired, an elopement planned, but as the roads were bad, the postboys got in a deplorable condition.



In which Uncle Jack was wounded, as a long-healed scar still plainly shows—a scar of which Aunt Keziak is justly proud.

"Past cottages, homesteads, hostleries dashed We at break-neck speed; our postboys were splashed With mud to their very hair; The night-capped pikemen, with lantern in hand, Would slowly turn out, then drowsily stand And pocket their tolls and swear.

"We were crossing a bleak and lonely heath (I shivered with cold; and as for my teeth, They rattled like castanets) When the horses stopped. A highwayman masked Rode out of the gloom and politely asked, 'Will you kindly pay your debts?'

"In my startled eyes he intently gazed, Made a sweeping bow and his mask he raised: By the lamplight's fitful glow I saw that the robber as bold as brass— Who suffered us unmolested to pass— Was Dick Burlington, my beau!

"We heard later on that, at break of day, 'Old loco parentis' (as Jack would say), He waylaid upon our track; Emptied his pockets, asked after his gout, Bade the postilions wheel quickly about— So they drove my guardian back.

"Pronounced man and wife at the blacksmith's forge, We stayed at a farm in a Highland gorge; But we were, to my delight, Afterward married at Berwick old church (You can, if you doubt, the register search) According to English rite."

EDMUND PETLEY.

Aunt Keziak pauses; a scar long healed On the Squire's bald pate is proudly revealed As she doffs his bobtail wig; She kisses the spot, a tear in her eye, Adjusts his peruke (it is cocked awry), And, chirruping like a grig,

The runaways, however, by dint of driving at break-neck speed, managed to get an excellent start, notwithstanding serious delays caused by drowsy toll-keepers.



Keziak's guardian followed, but was stopped by a highwayman, who not merely made him stand and deliver, but ordered the postboys to turn round and drive the old gentleman back the way he came.



Aunt Keziak had many admirers then, among whom was Dick Burlington, whose "coats were a dream"