

THOMAS CHANDLER

HALIBURTON, ALGER HORATIO JR.

# NOTHING TO EAT

**Thomas Chandler Haliburton**  
**Horatio Alger**  
**Nothing to Eat**

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*Nothing to Eat:*

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# Horatio Alger, Thomas Chandler Haliburton

## Nothing to Eat

*"I'll nibble a little at what I have got."*

*—"My appetite's none of the best.  
And so I must pamper the delicate thing."*

*—The least mite will suffice:  
A side bone and dressing and bit of the breast.  
The tip of the rump—that's it—and one of the fli's"*

# The Argument

THOUGH famine prevails not at all in the city;  
Though none of starvation have died in the street;  
Yet many there are now exciting our pity,  
Who're daily complaining of nothing to eat.

The every-day cry and the every-day fare,  
That's every day heard where the Livewells are dining,  
Is nothing to eat, or else nothing to wear,  
Which naked and starving rich Merdles are whining.

There's Kitty Malone—Mrs. Merdle 'tis now—  
Was ever on earth here before such a sinner;  
Protesting, excusing and swearing a vow,  
She'd nothing worth eating to give us for dinner.

Why Kitty, if starving for want of a meal,  
And had'nt a cent in the world to buy meat,  
You wouldn't exclaim with a more pious zeal,  
"I'm dying of hunger—we've nothing to eat!!"

# The Proof—the Queen of Fashion

The point I advance, if it need confirmation,  
I'll prove by a witness that few will dispute,  
A pink of perfection and truth in the nation  
Where fashion and folly are all of a suit.

'Tis "Merdle the banker"—or rather his wife,  
Whose fashion, religion, or music, or dress,  
Is followed, consulted, by many through life,  
As pilots are followed by ships in distress;  
For money's a pilot, a master, a king,  
Which men follow blindly through quicksands and shoals,  
Where pilots their ships in a moment might fling  
To destruction the vessel and cargo and souls.

'Twas money made Kitty of fashion the queen,  
And fortune oft lends queens the scepter;  
So fortune and fashion with this one we've seen  
Her money and fortune in fashion has kept her;  
While slaves of the queen with her hoops rules the day,  
Expanding their utmost extent of expansion,  
And mandates of fashion most freely obey,  
And would if it bid all their souls to extinction.

# The Object aimed at

But what “lady patron” as queen holds the sway;  
Or sweeping, whose hoops in the street are most sweeping;  
The burthen is not of this truth-telling lay,  
That should in its reading the world set to weeping,  
While telling the suff’rings from head to the feet,  
Of poor human beings with *nothing to eat*.



# What another Poet did

Another expounder of life's thorny mazes  
Excited our pity at fortune's hard fare,  
And troubled the city's most troublesome places,  
While singing his ditty of "Nothing to Wear."

"A tale worth the telling," though I tell for the same,  
Great objects of pity we see in the street,  
"With nothing to wear, though a legion by name,  
Is not to buy clothing, but something to eat.

# How the Author sometimes Dines

And now by your leave I will try to expound it,  
In truth as it is and the way that I found it.

My dinner, sometimes, like things transcendental  
And things more substantial, like women and wine  
A thing is, uncertain, and quite accidental,  
And sometimes I wonder, "Oh! where shall I dine?"

It was when reflecting one evening of late,  
What tavern or hotel or dining-room skinner,  
With table cloth dirty and dirtier plate,  
Would give me a nausea and call it a dinner,  
I met with Jack Merdle, a name fully known  
As good for a million in Stock-gamblers' Street,  
Where none but a nabob or forger high flown  
With "bulls" or with "bears" need look for a seat.

# Merdle the Banker

Now Merdle this day having toss'd with his horns  
The bears that were pulling so hard at the stocks,  
And gored every bull that was treading his corns,  
Had lined all his pockets with "plenty of rocks,"  
And home now was driving at "two forty" speed,  
Where dinner was waiting—"a jolly good feed."

Himself feeling happy, he knew by my looks,  
A case full of sadness and deep destitution  
Was present in person, not read of in books,  
Appealing in pity for an alms institution.

# Places Where Mortals Dine

The case, too, was urgent, for there stood a sinner,  
Whose fate hung on chance—a chance for his dinner;  
A chance for all mortals, with truth I assert,  
Who eat where his chance was, to counteract fate,  
“To eat during life each a peck of pure dirt”  
By eating at once the whole peck from one plate.  
For true when I think of the places we eat at,  
Or rather the places by hunger when driven  
We rush in and swallow our bread and our meat at,  
A bushel good measure in life will be given  
To those who are living a “boarding-house life,”  
Or those who are driven by fortune to journey,  
And eat when we must with so dirty a knife,  
I wish’t could be done by the power of attorney;  
Or where you must eat in a place called “saloon;”  
Or “coffee-house” synonym of whisky and rum;  
(I wish all the breed were sent off to the moon,  
And earth was well clear of the coffee-house scum;)  
Or where “Restauration” hangs out for sign,  
At bar-room or cellar or dirty back room,  
Where dishcloths for napkins are thought extra fine,  
And table cloths look as though washed with a broom;  
Where knives waiters spit on and wipe on their sleeves,  
And plates needing polish, with coat tails are cleaned;

Where priests dine with harlots, and judges with thieves,  
And mayors with villains his worship has screened.

# Things That Mortals Eat There

And what do you eat in the mess there compounded?  
For roast beef, the gravy the soap-man should claim—  
The soup some odd things might turn up if sounded,  
And other “made-dishes” might turn up the same.

Decoctions that puzzle your chemical skill,  
You get if you call either coffee or tea;  
And milk that is made with and tastes of the swill,  
As like milk, as wine is that often we see  
Is like to the juice of the grape in perfection,  
Or like as the candidate after election  
Is like the fair thing that we hoped or expected  
Before the base thief was exposed or detected;  
As like truth and virtue—and more is the pity—  
The men we elected to rule our own city.

In “council” while sitting, though “common” we call them,  
In common opinion, if people at large  
Are’s common in morals, no worse could befall ‘em  
If Satan should take them at once in his charge.

If food as their filth was as plenty for diet,  
No lack would they feel of the coveted cash,  
Or power they maintain with the power of a riot,

When heads of opponents are served up as hash  
By Star-chamber cooks of the club “restoration,”  
That rules now the city and would rule the nation,  
If “Sachems” were willing the “Wigwam” to yield,  
And give the arch-traitor a fair fighting field.

But fighting just now is not our intention,  
But dining with Merdle, the banker, in state,  
And only these items like side dishes mention,  
While waiting the coming the main dinner plate.

# The Invitation

While waiting debating I stated before,  
Jack Merdle drove up in his carriage and bays,  
“Halloo,” said the banker, “I see you’re ashore—  
No wonder—this weather is all in a haze—  
But come in my carriage, and truly confess  
You’re a victim of hunger and dinner down town;  
A case of most common distressing distress;  
When dining in public with Jones, Smith or Brown,  
Or some other practical men of the nation,  
Is worse on the whole than a little starvation.

But come home with me for the sake of Lang Syne,  
And see Mrs. Merdle and see how we dine.

I must not expect,” he advised in advance,  
“To meet with a dinner got up in perfection,  
But must run the risk of the luck and the chance,  
As candidates do on the day of election.”



# The Merdle Origin

Now Merdle, *en passant*, I had known for a score  
Of years, when a dinner with Jones, Brown or Smith  
As good as one gets for a quarter or more,  
Was a thing unthought of, or else but a myth  
In Merde's day-dreaming of things yet in store,  
When hope painted visions of a painted abode,  
And hope never hoped for anything more—  
I'm sure never dreamed he would dine *a la mode*.

In dreams wildest fancy I doubt if he dreamed,  
That time in its changes that wears rocky shores,  
Should change what so changeless certainly seemed,  
Till Merdle, Jack Merdle, would own twenty stores,  
Much more own a bank, e'en the horse that he rode,  
Or pay half the debts of the wild oats he sowed.

I knew when he worked at his old father's trade,  
And thought he would stick to his wax and the last,  
But Fortune, the fickle, incontinent jade,  
A turn to his fortune has given a cast;  
"A wife with a fortune," which men hunt in packs,  
To Jack was the fortune that fell to his share;  
A fortune that often is such a hard tax,  
That men hurry through it with "nothing to spare,"

With “nothing to eat,” or a house “fit to live in,”  
With “nothing half decent” to put on their backs,  
With nothing “exclusive” to have or believe in,  
“Except what is common to common street hacks.”

So fortune and comfort, that should be like brothers,  
Though fought for and bled for where fortunes are made,  
Though sought for and failed of by ten thousand others,  
Are not worth the fighting and fuss that is made.

But fortune for Merdle by Cupid was cast,  
And bade him look higher than wax and the last,  
That Merdle his father, with good honest trade,  
Had used with the stitches his waxed end had made.

I knew when old Merdle lived down by the mill,  
I often went fishing and Jack dug the bait;  
But Jack Merdle then never thought he should fill  
With fish and roast meat such a full dinner plate:  
Nor I, when my line which I threw for a trout  
While Jack watched the bob of the light floating cork,  
Ever thought of the time in a “Merdle turn out”  
To ride, or to dine with a pearl handle fork  
In Jack’s splendid mansion, where taste, waste and style,  
Contend for preemption, as then by the mill,  
Old Merdle contended with fortune the while,  
For bread wherewithal Jack’s belly to fill.

I never thought then little Kitty Malone

As heir to old Gripus would bring him the cash,  
'Pon which as a banker Jack Merdle has shone,  
And Kitty in fashion has cut such a dash;  
Nor when as a girl not a shoe to her feet,  
She accepted my offers of coppers or candy,  
She would tell me in satin "we've nothing to eat,"  
While eating from silver or sipping her brandy,  
And wond'ring that Merdle, the Jack I have named,  
Should bring home a friend—('twas thus she exclaimed—  
The day that I've mentioned—a day to remember—  
When Merdle and I in his carriage and bays,  
Through Avenue Five on a day in September,  
Drove up to a mansion with gas-light ablaze.)

# Mrs. Merdle At Home

She Discourseth of Nothing to Eat and the Cost thereof.

Why Merdle—why did you bring Dinewell to-day?  
So very, though welcome, so quite unexpected!

For dinner, if any, I'm sure I can't say,  
Our servants with washing are all so infected.

If any's provided, 't is nothing but scraps  
Of pot-luck or pick up of some common fare;  
Or something left over from last week perhaps,  
Which you've brought a friend, and an old one, to share.

I never, I'm sure now, so much was ashamed,  
To think he'll discover—what's true to the letter—  
We've nothing, or next to't that's fit to be named,  
For one who is used every day to what's better.

But what can you expect if you come on a Monday?  
Our French cook's away too, I vow and declare—  
But if you would see us with something to spare,  
Let's know when you're coming, or come on a Sunday;  
For that of all others, for churchmen or sinners,  
A day is for gorging with extra good dinners.

If Merdle had told me a friend would be here,  
A dinner I'd get up in spite of the bills—  
I often tell butcher he's wonderful dear—  
He says every calf that a butcher now kills,  
Will cost near as much as the price of a steer,  
Before all the banks in their discount expanded  
And flooded the country with 'lamp-black and rags,'  
Which poor men has ruined and shipwrecked and stranded  
On Poverty's billows and quick-sands and crags.

And that is just what, as our butcher explains,  
The dickens has played with our beef and our mutton;  
But something is gained, for, with all of his pains,  
The poor man won't make of himself such a glutton.

I'm sure if they knew what a sin 't is to eat,  
When things are all selling at extravagant prices,  
That poor folks more saving would be of their meat,  
And learn by example how little suffices.

I wish they could see for themselves what a table—  
What examples we set to the laboring poor,  
In prudence, and saving, in those who are able  
To live like a king and his court on a tour.

I feel, I acknowledge, sometimes quite dejected  
To think, as it happens with you here today,  
To drop in so sudden and quite unexpected,

How poor we are living some people will say.

# Mrs. Merdle goes to Market

With prices outrageous they charge now for meat,  
And servants so worthless are every day growing,  
I wonder we get half enough now to eat,  
And shouldn't if 't want for the fact of my going  
To market to cheapen potatoes and beef,  
And talk to the butchers about their abuses,  
And listen to stories beyond our belief,  
They tell while they cheat us, by way of excuses.

And grocers—do tell us—is 't legal to charge  
Such prices for sugar, and butter, and flour?

Oh, why don't the Mayor in his wisdom enlarge  
Both weight and measure as he does 'doubtful power?'

# The Dinner-bell Rings

*Mrs. Merdle Describes the Sufferings of Dyspepsia  
and its Remedy.*

But come, now, I hear by the sound of the ringing  
That dinner is ready; and time none to spare  
To finish our eating in time for the singing  
At Niblo's; or at Burton's drop in for a stare.

To 'kill time' the object, whatever the source is,  
And that is the reason we sit at the table  
And call for our dinner in slow-coming courses,  
To kill, while we eat, all the time we are able.

Though little, I told you, that's worthy your taste  
You'll find on our table, pray don't think us mean—  
Your welcome is ample—that's better than waste—  
Oh! here comes the soup in a silver tureen—  
'Tis mock turtle too—so good for digestion:  
That kills me by inches, the wretched complaint  
Dyspepsia—to cure which, I take by suggestion  
Port-wine in the soup, when I feel slightly faint.



# The Dinner Table Talk

Now soup, if you like made of beef very nice,  
You'll find this the next thing to the height of perfection;  
And eaten with ketchup, or thickened with rice,  
Will suit you I know, if this is your selection.

My own disposition to this one inclines,  
But dreadful dyspepsia destroys all the pleasure  
Of dinner, except it's well tinctured with wines  
Which plan I adopt as a health-giving measure.

A table well ordered, well furnished, and neat,  
No wonder our nature for ever is tempting;  
And I'd like to know if Mahomet could beat  
Its pleasures—dyspepsia for ever exempting—  
With all that he promised in paradise gained,  
With Houris attendant in place of the churls  
With which we are worried, tormented, and pained—  
The colored men servants, or green Irish girls.

# Mrs. Merdle doubts Paradise's Uneating Pleasure

Though Houris are handsome, though lovely the place—  
More lovely perhaps than our own country seat—  
I never could see, in the light of free grace  
What pleasure they have there with nothing to eat.

With nothing to wear, if the climate is suiting,  
We might get along I am sure pretty well;  
No washing and starching and crimping and fluting,  
No muslin and laces and trouble of dressing, they tell,  
E'er troubles the women, or bothers the men,  
Who soon grow accustomed, as people do here,  
To fashions prevailing, and things that they ken;  
To dresses fore-shortened where bosoms appear;  
To bonnets that show but a rose in the wearing;  
To dresses that sweep like a besom the street;  
To dresses so gauzy the hoops through are seen;  
To shoes quite as gauzy to cover the feet;  
But watch how a man here goes raving and swearing,  
At wife and all hands, if they've nothing to eat!

# Mrs. Merdle Discourseth of Things Earthly

No matter how costly or flimsy her dresses,  
The angel you honor with your kind attentions;  
No matter how foolish her wardrobe inventions,  
You love her, or say so, from slipper to tresses;  
But, presto! you call her the greatest of sinners,  
Though smiling, she treats you to badly cooked dinners;  
Which proves where the seat is of men's best affections,  
With which 'pon their honor they extol us as wives,  
And treat us at dinner with sagest reflections,  
Of beauty, and duty we owe all our lives  
To you, noble lords, of this mundane creation;  
Which, judging from some things they tell us,  
Was made for the creatures of this trading nation,  
Who make it a business to buy us and sell us,  
Like 'Erie,' or 'Central,' or other such stocks;  
With care, when they bid for a very 'Miss Nancy,'  
That she's of a stock that the brokers call 'fancy,'  
Or else has a pocket 'chuck full of the rocks'—  
The rocks that are wrecking each day of their sailing,  
More fortunes than ever in ocean were swallowed;  
Where 'ventures' of marriage their victims impaling  
With mammon and mis'ry together have wallowed.

# Mrs. Merdle Discourseth of Things Eatable

Now Colonel, to husband you need not be winking,  
While wiping the soup with a smile from your lips;  
I know just as well as he does how you're thinking  
The soup is as tasteless as though made of chips.

You need not deny it, and swear that no better  
Concocted was ever in London or Paris;  
Remember the praises you gave in your letter  
Of cooking and eating you wrote to Miss Harris.

Now, Colonel, don't offer a word more to flatter—  
The soup may be so-so, but wait for the meat;  
And after you've seen the last dish, plate, or platter,  
You'll own then, I'm certain, we've nothing to eat—  
That is compared, as described to Miss Harris,  
With all the best tables you eat at in Paris.

# Mrs. Merdle Ordereth the Second Course

Come, John, Jane, and Susan, the soup take away,  
And bring in the turbot, the sheep's head and bass;  
And have you got lobster and salad to-day?  
And see that the celery's all right in the glass.

Now fish—Colonel Dinewell, which fish will you try?  
And how shall I dress it to suit your nice taste?  
For sauce to the fish is as love to the sigh,  
Imperfect, it's worthless, and both prove a waste.

# Mrs. Merdle Discourseth of Hygiene and Fish Sauce

But this is concocted by rules so complete;  
Though piquant, is healthy and easy digested;  
And if you will note it as slowly we eat,  
The contents I'll give for our friends interested.

Imprimus: in fish stock, an onion we stew,  
And anchovy essence two spoonfuls we add;  
With butter, horse-radish, and lemons a few;  
Mushrooms, too, in ketchup is not very bad;  
And pickle of walnuts with onions chopped fine,  
To which there is added some old sherry wine.

My doctor, so queer, when I suffer distress,  
Inquires what I've latterly foolishly eaten,  
And swears that to swallow this 'horrible mess,'  
Would entitle a dog like a dog to be beaten.

But la! such a doctor knows nothing of women's complaints,  
And talks Latin nonsense about 'regular diet;'  
And thinks that us mortals—should live more like saints,  
On moonshine and nonsense of a heavenly quiet.

He says that a woman of my plaint complaining,

If she was a woman at all half discreet,  
Would shudder to think every day she is maiming  
Her stomach with trash, and such stuff as we eat!

# Mrs. Merdle Describeth her Doctor

But he's an old fogy, you may know by this sign—  
He don't smoke tobacco, drink lager or wine;  
And swears that rich gravy, roast pork or chop,  
Would kill a big ostrich, if stuffed in his crop.

He told me one day 'bout the pain in my feet,  
'I see what 't is ails you—you've nothing to eat!'

Provoking, absurd, foolish hint that my health  
Was injured by eating what station and wealth  
And fashion give right for my sex to enjoy  
In spite of the doctors we choose to employ.



# Mrs. Merdle Discourseth again on Dinner

But you are not eating, and I fear that the fish,  
Or else 't is the gravy's not done to your wish.

You're starving while waiting for something to eat—  
Thank fortune I told you how poorly we live—  
I hope John now will give us a piece of roast meat,  
Or else such a dinner you'd never forgive.

Why yes, Merdle, look, there is beef on that dish—  
Jane Hill, don't you see, there's a plate here to shift—  
That John is now bringing—'t is all he can lift—  
And Colonel, that turkey, you know 't is my wish—  
You know that Excelsior's your motto in carving—  
As nothing more now we shall have on the table  
"We'll eat and give thanks this day that we're able  
To keep our poor bodies entirely from starving.

Now Susan's this all that you've been able to pick up?  
Oh, no! there's a ham, and it's done to a turn  
So nice, that the nose of a Jew needn't stick up;  
And a tongue—well, a tongue I never could spurn;  
It's nice while the wine at our leisure we sip;  
And good with a cracker in wine we can dip.



# **Mrs. Merdle Accepteth of a slight Dinner, suitable for a Woman suffering with Dyspepsia**

Some turkey? why yes—the least mite will suffice;  
A side bone and dressing and bit of the breast;  
The tip of the rump—that's it—and one o' the fli's—  
In spite of the doctor: my appetite's none of the best,  
And so I must pamper the delicate thing,  
And tickle a fancy that's very capricious  
With bits of a turkey, the breast or the wing,  
With beef very tender, and gravy delicious.

Some beef now? I thank you, not any at present;  
I'll nibble a little at what I have got,  
And wish for a duck, or a grouse, or a pheasant,  
Though none of them come for a wish, in the pot.

# Mrs. Merdle Discourseth of Wishes and her Sufferings

‘If wishes were horses’—I’ve heard when a girl—  
‘If wishes were horses, the beggars would ride’—  
If wishes were pheasants, I’d wish with a skirl  
Till cooked ones came flying and sat by my side.

A fig, then, for doctors, their tinctures and drugs;  
Good eating would cure me, with plenty of game;  
And as for pill boxes, and bottles, and jugs,  
I wouldn’t know one, when I saw it, by name.

Oh, dear! such a load now my stomach oppresses,  
While eating these trifles, attempting to dine—  
I’m sure ‘taint the turkey—it must be my dresses—  
And if so ‘t will ease them to sip sherry wine.

‘Tis sad, though, to be such a sad invalid—  
Dear me, Colonel Dinewell, you’ve done eating meat—  
Your doctor, like mine, I hope hasn’t forbid,  
That you shouldn’t have, as I do, so little to eat.  
Ah! well then, I see, though I’ve hardly begun,  
The meats and the solids must go right away;  
So bring in the pudding, if Susan’s got one,  
Which will for a while one’s appetite stay.



# Mrs. Merdle Discourseth of Pudding

A pudding! why yes, as I live, too, it's plum;  
So plain, Susan makes them on purpose for me  
I never refuse, when the plum puddings come,  
To finish my dinner, if finished 't can be  
On things unsubstantial, like puddings and pies,  
So made up of suet, and currants, and flour,  
Like this one before us, to get up the size,  
And stirred up and beaten with eggs by the hour,  
With bread crumbs, and citron, and small piece of mace;  
With nutmeg, and cinnamon, and sugar, and milk,  
And" currants, and raisins, and spices so race,  
And what else I know not of things of that ilk.

The whole after cooking six hours at the least,  
When thus well compounded with delicate skill,  
With wine sauce is eaten, to finish the feast,  
And suits the digestion of ladies quite ill,  
Who suffer as I do, from having bad cooks,  
And very weak stomachs, and food that near kills 'em;  
And then such a sight of bad rules in the books  
From contents to finis, to cure one that fills 'em.

There's one of all others so much recommended  
To cure every ill of old Eve's every daughter,

With nothing or next to't, for medicine expended,  
For nothing to cure with is used but cold water.

And what with the bathing, and washing, and scrubbing;  
The packing, and sweating, and using the sheet;  
The shower bath, and douche bath, and all sorts of rubbing;  
And literally nothing but brown bread to eat,  
No wonder the patient accepts of the lure,  
To escape such a ducking, acknowledged a cure.

But Lord, what a skein I have made of my yarn,  
While Susan's arranging and changing the plates,  
And running all round old Robin Hood's barn,  
Like puzzles at school that we made on our slates;  
But talking of puzzles, no one that we made,  
While playing the fool we played as a trade,  
When childhood and folly joined hands at the schools,  
Could equal the pranks of these cold-water fools.

Yes, yes, Mr. Merdle, I knew by the smelling  
The pudding was ready, without any telling;  
So Colonel, I'll help you a delicate slice—  
For nothing, I'm sure, like a dinner you've eaten—  
And afterwards follow with jelly and ice,  
So pleasant while waiting to cool off the heat on;  
And then with a syllabub, comfit, or cream,  
Our dessert of almonds and raisins we'll nibble,  
Till coffee comes in to revive with it's steam,  
When cakes in its fragrance we'll leisurely dabble.

I'm sure after all it's a terrible bore  
To labor so hard as we do for our victuals;  
I envy the women that beg at the door,  
Or hire out for wages to handle your kettles,  
And wash, bake, and iron, and do nothing but cooking,  
So rugged and healthy, and often good looking:  
The doctor has told me except when they're mothers,  
They never take tincture, or rhubarb, or pill,  
And swears the profession if there were no others,  
Their patients would use up, and starve out and kill.

I'm sure I don't see how that makes them exempt  
From all sorts of sickness and woman's complaints,  
With nothing to hinder if appetite tempt  
From eating or drinking as happy as saints.

Oh Lord, now, this pudding so delicate made,  
And gravy I'm sure with nothing that's rich in,  
That one of those women who beg as a trade,  
The whole in one stomach could leisurely pitch in,  
Is now in my own so terribly painful in feeling,  
Its calls for relief are most loudly appealing.



# **Mrs. Merdle Discourseth of the necessity of good Wine and other Matters**

So while we are eating the fruits of the vine,  
Don't let us forget such a health giving juice,  
As Champagne, or Sherbet, or other good wine,  
Nor sin by neglecting its 'temperate use.'

Now Sherbet, my husband extols to the skies,  
With me though, my stomach is weak and won't bear it:  
And Sherry, though sometimes affecting my eyes,  
A bottle with pleasure we'll open and share it.

Ha, ha, well-a-day—what a queer world to live in,  
If one were contented on little to dine,  
We need not be longing another to be in,  
Where women, they tell us, exist without wine;  
Where husbands are happy and women content;  
Where dresses, though gauzy, are fit for the street;  
Where no one is wretched with purses unbent,  
With nothing to wear and nothing to eat.

Where women no longer are treated la Turk,  
Where husbands descended from Saxon or Norman,

For women when sickly are willing to work,  
And not long for Utah and pleasures la Mormon—  
Where men freely marry and live with their wives,  
And not live as you do, mon Colonel, so single.

Such wretched and dinnerless bachelor lives;  
You don't know the pleasure there is in the tingle  
Of ears pricked by lectures, la curtain, au Caudle,  
Or noise of young Dinewells beginning to toddle;  
While plodding all day with your paper and quills,  
And copy, and proof sheets, and work for the printer,  
Pray what do you know of the housekeeper's bills,  
And other such 'pleasures of hope' for the winter?

You men, selfish creatures, think all of the care  
Of living and keeping yourselves in existence,  
Is due to your own daily labor, and share,  
From breakfast to dinner of business persistence;  
While woman is either a plaything or drudge,  
According to station of wealth or position,  
Which men help along with a word or a nudge  
To heaven high up or low down to perdition.

But what was I saying of a world free from care,  
Of eating and drinking and dresses to wear?

Where women by husbands are never tormented,  
And never asked money where husbands dissented?  
And never see others, their rivals, in fashion ahead,

And never have doctors—a woman's great dread—  
And nothing, I hope, like my own indigestion,  
To torment and starve them, as this one does me,  
And keep them from sipping—forgive the suggestion—  
The nectar ethereal they drink for their tea.

# **Mrs. Merdle Suggesteth that Dinner being finished, the Gentlement will Smoke. In the meantime, she Discourseth**

“Now Merdle—now Colonel—I know you are waiting.  
And thinking my talking to eating’s a bar,  
Still hoping, by tasting, my appetite sating,  
Will give you the license to smoke a cigar.

Well then, I’ve done now, and hope too you’ve dined,  
As well as down town where you dine for a shilling,  
At Taylor’s, or Thompson’s, or one of the kind,  
Where mortals are flocking each day for their filling;  
Or else at the Astor where bachelors quarter,  
Where port holes for windows give light to the room,  
Far out of the region of Eve’s every daughter,  
So high they are stuck up away toward the moon.

Though as for the ‘stuck up’ no walls built of brick,  
Or granite, or marble, or dirty red sand,  
Could stick up a man who himself’s but a stick,  
An inch above where he would naturally stand.

To witness the truth of this final assertion,  
I call you to witness the sticks at the door,  
Where they make it a daily, a 'manly' diversion,  
To ogle each woman, and sometimes do more,  
Who passes the hotel that's named by a saint,  
Where boorish bad manners give room for complaint.

Where idlers and loafers, with gamblers a few,  
Make up for the nonce the St. Nicholas crew.

The 'outside barbarians,' I freely confess,  
Who ogle our faces and ogle our dress,  
Who spit where we walk as dirty a puddle  
As bipeds can make when their brains are 'a muddle,'  
Do not prove the inside is as dirty as they are,  
Or else the gods help all the ladies who stay there.

Why any prefer in a hotel to stay,  
Instead of a house of their choosing to own,  
Is just to avoid all the trouble, they say,  
That servants to give us are certainly prone,  
I'm sure if a tyranny more terrible prevails,  
In Austria or other despotic domain,  
My memory where most certainly fails,  
That servants and milliners over us gain,  
Just here in New York, and the more is the pity,  
Where Wood is the Mogul that governs the city.

# Mrs. Merdle, having “Nibbled a Little” for two Hours at Dinner, retireth from the Table unsatisfied

“Impatient—oh yes—just the way with you men!

I never have time to half finish my eating  
Ere Merdle is done; such a fidget is then,  
He’d starve me I think rather ‘n miss of a meeting  
Where brokers preside o’er the fate of the stocks,  
As Pales presided o’er shepherds and flocks.

Now while you are smoking—what nonsense and folly—  
I’ll go to my room.—don’t say No, for I must—  
Put on a new dress, with assistance of Molly,  
And then with a little strong tea and a crust,  
My strength I may hope for a walk will be able  
As far as the gate, and a very short ride,  
To give me a relish again for the table—  
What else do we live for in this world beside?”

# The Poet Moralizeth—He Discourseth to those who Gorge and Complain

Oh! Kitty Malone—Mrs. Merdle 'tis now—  
Was there ever on earth than this, greater folly?

Still gorging, while groaning, and swearing a vow,  
That yours is a case of most sad melancholy.

With table that Croesus never had but might covet,  
You live but to eat and to eat 'cause you love it;  
And yet while you swallow great sirloins of meat  
Complain like a beggar of nothing to eat.

# He Discourseth of the Wherefore of Bachelorism

“What else do we live for in this world beside?”

Alas! ‘t is the question of ten times a day,  
That comes on the wind, or that floats on the tide,  
And creeps in the houses where men go to pray.

What else do we live for than get such a wife  
As this of the banker of our faint description?

What else is the end of our fashionable life  
From which men escape as they would from conscription?

What else is the reason so few natives marry,  
Than this, that extravagance leads on to ruin?

It is because few men are able to carry  
The load of this baking and roasting and stewing,  
Of buying and wasting extravagant meat,  
Where women are dying of “nothing to eat;”  
Where men in corruption so rapidly tending,  
In morals and wealth in bankruptcy ending.

That forging and stealing and breaches of trust,



And ten thousand arts of the confidence game,  
And follies uncounted of men “on a bust,”  
Are follies and crimes of this age to our shame,  
Till angels who witness the folly so wide  
Extended from palace to farm-house and cot,  
Might wonder if mortals life’s objects forgot,  
Or Merdle’s position is man’s common lot?

# He Discourseth of What some Mortals Live for

“What else do they live for in this world beside?”

What else but for Kittys or one of the same,  
Do mothers their daughters at schools give the touch  
That leaves them to live as a wife but in name  
While position and fashion they frantically clutch.

What else do they live for, our girls so refined,  
So forward, precocious, and gifted at ten  
They are flirting and courting and things of the kind,  
That never came under our grandmother’s ken.

At fifteen so dressed up, and hooped up, I ween,  
They’re mothers full often before they’re sixteen,  
And fading and dowdy and sickly at twenty,  
With one boy in trowsers and two girls in laces  
Complaining of starving while dying of plenty  
The fate is of ladies in fashionable places.

# He Imploreth Mercy upon those condemned with fashionable folly to Marry, and Illustrateth their Condition

Now heaven in mercy be kind to the wretch,  
Who marries for money or fashion or folly;  
He'd better accept of the noose of Jack Ketch  
Than such a "help-meet;" or at once marry Dolly  
The cook, or with Bridget, the maid of the broom;  
With one he'd be sure to get coffee and meat,  
And never hear whining of nothing to eat,  
And 't other would make up his bed and his room;  
And if he was blest with a child now and then,  
As happens sometimes with your fashionable wives,  
Who're coupled to bipeds, in nature called men,  
He'd need no insurance to warrant their lives;  
And need no expense of a grand "bridal tour,"  
Or visit each season at "watering places,"  
Where fashion at people well known to be poor,  
In money or station, will make ugly faces;  
Where women, though married, with roues will flirt;  
Where widows, though widows in fresh sable weeds,  
Spread nets that entangle like old Nessus' shirt

And finish with Burdell and Cunningham deeds;  
Where daughters when fading are taken to spend  
A month at the springs, or a week in salt water;  
Where bachelors flirting on Ellen attend,  
Are whispered by mamma, “engaged to my daughter.”

# He Imploreth Merry for other Unfortunate Beings

Now heaven in mercy be kind to the wretches  
Who stay on the earth like this Mrs. Merdle!

More wretched than ever a wretch on the hurdle  
Was drawn by all England's official Jack Ketches;  
More wretched, if can be, at church on a Sunday  
A woman, who worships, than God, more her dress,  
Would be if she heard or e'en thought Mrs. Grundy  
Would sneer at the set of a bonnet or tress;  
Or say that she thought Miss Freelove's new pattern  
Of laces, or collars, or yard flowing sleeves,  
Looked more like the dress of a real Miss Slattern  
And not "so becoming" 's the first one of Eve's.

# He Discourseth of a Common Prayer

Yet look at the thousands whose every day prayer,  
Far more than their own or their neighbor's salvation,  
Absorbs every thought, every dream, and all care,  
"To eat or to wear, is anything new in creation?"

# He Discourseth of Trouble and Sorrow

What else do they live for? They live but for this;  
And nothing but this ever troubles their thinking;  
Rich eating, rich dressing, and flirting's their bliss,  
And life's better purposes constantly blinking.

Their life's but a tissue of trouble and sorrow  
Of what is the fashion or will be to-morrow.

# He Moralizeth upon what a Day may Bring forth

“To-morrow!” who’ll warrant to-morrow we’ll see?

Who’ll care the next day or day after for dinner?

Or what the next fashion of new dress will be?

Or who Mrs. Grundy will say is the winner?

Having reached Thirtysixthly, the Author is  
about to Make the “Application,” and Pray  
forgiveness, but concludes by remaining Incog.

“Who’ll care for, to-morrow, for this bit of scandal,  
With malice prepense that a cynic has written?

(That’s what they will say when the poem they handle,  
Who feel ‘tis themselves whom the mad dog has bitten;  
And wish he was treated as dogs with the rabies  
Are treated, to stop his unmannerly bark;  
Or packed off to bed as you do naughty babies,  
To sleep, or be frightened all alone in the dark.)

Who’ll care? why the author of this ugly poem—



He'll care—for a reason—that all of you read it—  
He'll care for the cash you'll give—Oh! how he needs it—  
(Oh! what would you give, ladies dear, just to know him?—)

But that, by your leave, by the aid of the elf  
The printer employs, he will keep to himself.

He knows, if you knew him, what fate he would meet;  
At every table you'd give him—nothing to eat.

Excuse then, dear ladies, the author his shyness,  
And accept his conge at the end of this

**FINIS**