

CHAPTER - I

THE STRANGE GENTLEMAN

## Historical Background

"The first play performed publicly was The Strange Gentleman, which was staged at the St. James's Theatre, London, in September, 1836. Founded on one of the Sketches of Boz, The Great Winglebury Duel, the play is a light comedy which owes much to Oliver Goldsmith. An instant success, it ran for fifty performances and was revived more than once in 1837."<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note why this piece, a farcical comedy depending on misunderstandings in dialogue and situation had to be put on as a burletta. The reason was that the only London theatres at that time licensed under Royal patent for "straight" plays were Covent Garden, Drury Lane and the Hay Market, the last named operating only when the first two were closed for the summer recess. The principal fare was Shakespeare, Congreve, Farquhar, Vanbrugh and Sheridan, and occasionally opera, though new dramas and comedies were often introduced to make up a composite bill. Other houses, apart from the private theatres already noticed, could only present musical performance of a dramatic nature, such as operas, burlesques, and so on.

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1. Charles Dickens, Foreword. Collected Plays and Selected Poems. Ed. Shepherd Herne Richard, N. p. : W.H.Allen & Co., 1882. 1

Obviously, to evade the monotony, music had to be provided. But, in view of the looseness of the wording of the prohibition, other managements were quick to perceive that the musical "quota" could be reduced to minimum. Hence the announced duet in The Strange Gentleman, though there would be, of course, an overture, and interval music. An official end was put to this untenable situation by an act of parliament, though not till 1843. The Strange Gentleman, by the way, was played at the Park Theatre, New York, in the autumn of 1837 with Charlotte Cushman in the cast. As the very first of Dickens's plays to be mounted on a public theatre, the cast, as printed is worth preserving, if only as a museum piece.

### The Story Outline :

The story of The Strange Gentleman starts at and develops from Mrs Noakes's Inn. It is an ever busy inn because the landlady herself along with the waiters look after the comfort of the boarders and discipline of the inn. The inn is central to the play. As soon as the curtain is raised two ladies and a young man are seen booking a room in the inn. During the booking there arrives an odd man who intends to book a private sitting room. Thereafter the man becomes the focus of the action and the play is named after him.

Previously, the man had rented a room at the Royal Hotel, but he could not bear with the disturbance there.

He needs a room badly because the doors of his house have closed for him for ignoring his father's choice. Besides, a mysterious letter-cum-death warrant leads him to utter confusion and restricts his free movement. In his helplessness he decides to write to the Mayor about his wretchedness. But without posting it he confides his plan to Tom and promises him reward for the job. Tom runs on errand and the odd man wonders how he would be saved. While he passes tense time, Mary and Fanny, both boarders of the same inn, mistake him for Charles Tomkins and come to see him along with Mrs Noakes. Mary misunderstands Fanny because Fanny, she thinks, has been trying to keep the presence of Tomkins a secret. Fanny tries to make Mary understand that she does not know the whereabouts of Tomkins but she would not listen to her. Rather she goes to the man to check the truth of Fanny's statement. In this context it may be borne in mind it is a trying situation that has compelled Mary to come to the inn. John Johnson, Mary's sweet heart, has forced Mary to elope with him. On the way feeling that their funds were running short they have come to halt in the inn for collecting money. Fanny thinks that she could possibly be present at the inn and has reached the inn following Mary. Mary meets the old man and talks with him for an hour and decides to let him go. But the odd man comes to dote on Mary and tries to embrace her. Mary screams for help and cleverly saves her honour.

Julia meanwhile has mistaken the Strange Gentleman for Lord Peter and begun her journey towards Noakes's inn or St. James's Arms. On her way she meets the Mayor who has been called into Noakes's inn. Julia discloses to the Mayor her purpose of journey to the inn, and solicits his sympathetic help. The Mayor feels sympathy towards Julia, he listens to her plan and reaches the inn to meet Mrs Noakes and he tells the landlady what she will have to do. In fact, the plan is to take the odd man as a lunatic, so that he can be shifted to an asylum.

This shifting will help Julia to elope with the man, who appears to be Lord Peter to her. When the planning goes on in full swing. Tomkins reaches the inn and meets Fanny. But Fanny's coldness makes him suspicious. However, this misunderstanding does not last long. Julia also realizes her faults and when she tells the Strange Gentleman that she has no husband he takes Julia as his wife. Thus, the play ends with a merry note.

### Mrs Noakes

Mrs Noakes, a side character in Chintz gown, French apron and handsome cap, is nice enough. This land lady of the inn is well versed and basically good, for she feels for others sincerely. Her inn takes adequate care of the boarders and she herself helps the waiters in this regard. The smooth running of the inn points to her managerial competence. It is interesting to note that her moral sense often eclipses her commercial dealings with boarders. She is one of those characters who are the source of the play's humour. One can hardly forget the scene where along with the Mayor she herself takes the labour to remove the strange gentleman from the inn to an asylum. Again, her speech, "Poor dear! - Mad people always think other people mad." (27), bears testimony to her own sense of humour. Here the humour arises from the differences between the actual situation and her perception of it. Though sketched briefly, her character is not without development. Initially, Mrs Noakes, does not co-operate with the strange gentleman on account of his peculiar behaviour. In course of time she becomes sympathetic towards him. Thus, on the whole she is an impressive character.

### Waiters

Some of the minor characters in The Strange Gentleman are unimpressive, yet Dickens has taken much care to

individualise them.

John, the first waiter, greets the boarders. He takes care of them sincerely and seriously. He is diligent, honest and obedient. We notice him when he introduces a visitor to the land lady. The man needs a room in the inn. His presence is always felt, even when he does not do his own work, the job of a waiter. John's short and significant presence shows Dickens's thorough understanding of the life and activities of waiters.

#### Tom

Tom, the second waiter, is also very polite. He stays on the stage for a very brief period. He too is sincere and loyal. He is first seen when he is attending visitors. Always busy, Tom talks little, yet his sense of humour can hardly be missed. When Mrs Noakes enquires about the visitors, he replies to Mrs Noakes with his enviable sense of humour :

SECOND WAITER. Ladies are something alike, ma'am.

Gentleman. like neither of'em (7).

#### Will

The third waiter, Will, is more assertive than his co-waiters. He has an undaunted nature and a power of reasoning. Where Tom fails, Will succeeds comfortably. He too has a lively sense of humour. Consider his humorous description of the Strange Gentleman :

THIRD WAITER. No, ma'am; he's quite a stranger here. - He's a wonderful man to talk, ma'am keeps on like a steam engine Here he is, ma'am (8).

### The Strange Gentleman

The Strange Gentleman in the play The Strange Gentleman has two identities : one is the identity of a boarder and the other is the identity of a humour character. Indeed, he arrests our attention with his first appearance and rouses our curiosity that is sustained throughout the play. Again, the name of the man is in harmony with the comical tone of the play which has been described as a comic burletta.

In fact, this strange Gentleman has enjoyed an eventful boardership. He feels satisfied having lodged at the inn, though evidently he differs from the landlady on different issues. Indeed he is a man of conflicting traits of character. He is ill-logical too. This ill-disciplined boarder imprints a lasting impression upon our mind.

The play is based on misunderstanding and mistaken identity. So, this main character has continually been either misunderstood or mistaken for somebody else by other characters. Both Mary and Fanny mistake him for Charles Tomkins, and thus Mary gets involved in an embarrassing situation. The Strange Gentleman meets Mary, Fanny,

Mr Owen and Julia, Tom Sparks and a few other minor characters, and each meeting sheds significant light on the different aspect of his life. He is a man of good heart too. That is why he is deeply moved by Julia's pathetic confession :

JULIA (R.H. with her handkerchief to her eyes). And through Lord Peters' negligence. I have lost a husband! (38).

His sympathy towards Julia is so profound that he marries Julia unconditionally. Besides, the Strange Gentleman's jolly comments tickle the spectators to hearty laughter. Most of the humorous situations arise from his unusual activities. He bolts Mrs Noakes inside the room to talk privately to her. Again, he clasps Mary emotionally and offers a pure fun to the spectators. Again, it is difficult to forget that particular funny scene where both Julia and the Strange Gentleman conceal their own identities.

Like every well-drawn character, he too develops in the course of the play. His first appearance in the play is in sharp contrast to his behaviour in the latter part of the play. At the beginning we encounter his voice from 'without' (8).

STRANGE GENTLEMAN (without ). Now don't tell me, because that's all gammon and nonsense; and gammoned I never was, and never will be, by any waiter that ever drew the breath of life, or a cork - And just have the goodness to leave my portmanteau alone, because I can carry it very well myself; and show me a private room without further delay; for a private room I must and will have.—Damme, do you think I'm going to be murdered !

Enter the three waiters, C. DOOR - they form down L.H., the Strange Gentleman following, carrying his portmanteau and great coat.

There - this room will do capitally well. Quite the thing, - Just the fit. - How are you, ma'arr ? I suppose you are the landlady of this place ? Just order those very attentive young fellows out, will you and I'll order dinner. (8-9).

Here is the picture of a man who has enormous self-confidence. But this same gentleman is hurled in a sea of mistakes towards the end. He fails to keep his portmanteau with him as he fails to prevent the waiters from physically lifting up and shifting him not only from one room to another but also from St James's Arms into the arms of Julia Dobbs. Towards the end of the play when his innocent

behaviour is mistaken as feigned madness, he becomes a victim of most helpless situation and cannot even face the one-eyed boots. There is an interesting fluctuation in the fate of Trot in the course of short play. His condition changes from alarm to helplessness after which there is a sudden turn of events when he finds Julia as the most prospective bride for himself, and just before the curtain drops, we find him once again in his elements.

In this character Dickens has made a punch of the abnormal and the comic. His encounter with Mrs Noakes and Mary bears testimony to this blend of rusticity and comicality.

### Tom Sparks

Tom Sparks, a one-eyed 'Boots', calls our attention to his amusing presence. His self introduction is full of fun :

TOM (Still at the door). I'm the head o' that branch o' the establishment. There's another man under me, as brushes the dirt off and puts the blacking on. The fancy work's my department. I do the polishing, nothing else (13).

Though Tom is disabled, he can carry out jobs tirelessly. The Strange Gentleman depends on him largely for his job. Tom is a crafty person who has used fully the handicapped situation of the Strange Gentleman and demands

tips. Unlike other waiters Tom sparks is honest and loyal. His sense of humour deserves special attention. A few comical scenes arise from his enviable sense of humour :

STRANGE GENTLEMAN. Hallo! stop, are you the Boots?

TOM. (Still at the door). I'm the head o' that branch o' the establishment (13).

This verbal exchange between Tom and the Strange Gentleman bears the testimony to his commendable sense of humour. He is also a superb entertainer. Again, it is indeed interesting that his sense of humour is not incompatible with the rustic background :

TOM. Ay, ay. Anything you please. - poor creature; don't put yourself in a passion. It'll only make you worse (25).

Indeed, Tom is a fine creation of Dickens. He is an impressive boot with distinctive qualities.

## Mary Wilson

Mary is one of the significant women characters in the play The Strange Gentleman, she has been staged as a boarder, a lady-love and a humour-character. Mary has become one of the boarders in the inn of Mrs Noakes by accident. Mary and John Johnson on the way suddenly find out that their funds are running short. So, they take shelter at the inn. In the meantime Fanny reaches there and meets Mary. Fanny's unexpected presence enrages Mary. There ensues a short quarrel which throws much light on their characters. Uncomplaining as a boarder, Mary leaves home for a new destination as soon as she receives John Johnson's call. This highlights her emotional nature. Again, Mary is a girl of possessive personality. It is evident in her behaviour towards Fanny. Indeed, Mary's role as a sister does not impress us on account of her doubtful nature. Often she strikes us as rude and lacking in manners.

The short and significant verbal exchange between Mary and the Strange Gentleman produces huge laughter. The source of humour is her misunderstanding. However, there is a definite development in Mary's character. In the beginning Mary looks very rude and sceptical. Gradually she becomes calm, quiet and practical.

Incidentally, some critics think that the character of Mary has been modelled on Dicken's sister-in-law Mary Hogarth who died untimely.

### Fanny Wilson

Dickens has sketched two sisters in the play The Strange Gentleman. They are Mary and Fanny. Both the sisters lodge at the same inn. The conversation between Mary and Fanny shows their differences. Mary is somewhat despotic and rude; Fanny is passive, cool and sensible. She is a girl of calculating nature. Her power of reasoning is praise-worthy. Her elderly qualities add a dimension to her character. Despite Mary's rudeness, she never uses abusive words to Mary.

Fanny is Charles Tomkin's sweet heart. It may be passingly mentioned that the play does not bring this aspect under any sharp focus. It is learnt from their conversation that they dote on each other. True, Fanny differs from Tomkins on various issues. Fanny is rational, Tomkins is emotional.

Though Fanny is a realist, she feels for both Tomkins and the Strange Gentleman. She is a victim of misunderstanding between herself and Charles Tomkins. This misunderstanding creates a humorous situation. Her practical sense is in sharp contrast to Tomkin's emotional

exuberance. She is, in short, a memorable face in Dickens' portrait gallery.

### John Johnson

John Johnson is the smart-looking youngman who elopes with Mary and lodge temporarily at Mrs Noakes' inn as they run short of money.

It is interesting to note that Mary explains John Johnson as a 'harebrained' (15) and 'mad-cap swain' (15). Basically, John Johnson is a bit rough and indiscreet. He is critical of the arrangement of the inn. Though he is somewhat haughty, he has a feeling heart as evident from the following remark :

JOHN. unfortunate man ! It is the second time to-day that he has been the victim of this strange delusion (28).

The Strange Gentleman behaves with John Johnson improperly, yet he deeply feels for him :

JOHN. Poor fellow ! His hopeless condition is pitiable indeed. (Goes up) (29).

Though not a humour character, he is at the nucleus of more than one humorous situation. Consider the following defence of his relationship with Mary questioned by the Strange Gentleman :

JOHN. Legally sworn in! Sir, that is an insolent reflection upon the temporary embarrassment which prevents our taking the marriage vows. How dare you to insinuate - (19).

He is thus an impressive creation of Dickens.

### Julia Dobbs

In the play The Strange Gentleman a few women characters play significant role. Among them Julia Dobbs may be considered as the most attractive. She appears on the stage only in the second scene of the first Act although we hear of her before we see her. It is Julia who gives out the original identity of the so-called strange gentleman. The laborious journey that Julia undertakes to reach 'St. Jones's Arms' (5) shows her strength of mind and seriousness of purpose.

Julia Dobbs is a calculating and witty girl. The conversation between the Mayor and Julia Dobbs throws ample light on her character. It is learnt from the Mayor that Julia is an unfortunate girl as her arranged marriage had broken up on account of unavoidable reasons. However, both friends begin to talk to each other about old happy days. This shows that Julia is a good friend.

Julia has a strong heart, that is why she never easily surrenders to anything. She judges everything in the light of reason. Julia's plan to make the Strange Gentleman lunatic proves that she is resourceful enough. The recognition of her faults and consequent repentance .

"Oh! Sir, - spare my feelings - I did. - The horses were ordered and paid for; and everything was ready. (weeps)"(38). marks the development of her character.

Julia's acceptance of Mr Walker Trott as her husband reveals the helplessness of Victorian women who had no choice but to accept whatever came their way by accident.

#### Mr Owen Overton

The name of Mr Owen Overton, the Mayor of the town, is first heard from the 'odd' man who wishes to convey the news of his distress to the Mayor and pray for his intervention. So the Mayor came not only as an administrator but as a friend of Julia.

The Mayor has met Julia on the way quite accidentally, and come to know that she is in trouble. In order to help her he asks Mrs Noakes that she should do something for the benefit of Julia. But he is more a friend than the town-administrator. For the sake of friendship he becomes partial, when as a mayor he should be impartial. Indeed,

he is not very much competent as an administrator. He has neither the governing voice nor the strong personality. His power is enormous, yet his authority is nil. He prefers to steer through the middle course where there is hardly any risk. His approval of Julia's marriage is an example to it.

The Mayer is a humour-character in the play. When Julia demands for repayment of borrowed money, Overton humorously says :

OVERTON. Stay, Miss Dobbs, Stay.

As you say, we are old acquaintances,  
and there certainly were some small  
sums of money, which - which - (20).

This character is interesting and fine creation of Dickens.

### Charles Tomkins

Charles Tomkins is a spirited young boy. Fanny conveys her destination to him. Tomkins without delay reaches there following her information. Thus, Tomkins has been introduced to the spectators. It is interesting to note that Tomkins becomes emotionally involved with Fanny, though it has not been stated directly. This character possesses a soft heart in addition to his simplicity and sincerity.

Tomkins's short presence leaves a lasting impression upon our mind. He reaches the inn with a lot of hope, but Fanny disappoints him. Instead of giving Tomkins warm reception, Fanny receives him coldly. It enrages Tomkins and he grows suspicious. This reaction suggests that Tomkins is highly emotional.

Tomkins is aggressive in love, while Fanny as a lover is consistently rational. The audience enjoys the humour which arises out of their contrast. Tomkins's haughty attitude may possibly be explained as part of his rustic nature. Many humorous situations arise out of his misunderstanding. Tomkins anticipates one thing, but things happen otherwise. This gives delight to the spectators.

Finally, it is worth noting that Tomkins is a fine creation of Dickens. His short but significant appearance on the stage not only pleases us but adds a charm to the play.

### Chambermaid

The chambermaid is one of those poor, neglected characters for whom Dickens had a natural sympathy. The chief function of this character is to guide visitors to their respective rooms and to look after their comfort. One may question : What is the use of such character in the play ? The introduction of such characters gives a touch of realism to the social profile dramatised.

## Humour

Charles Dickens is a master creator of humour. As a writer he never forgot that art is primarily a source of amusement. Therefore his characters, situations and dialogues are soaked in humour though they never take us to the unreal world of fantasy.

In this play he has employed a few comic-characters. The Strange Gentleman himself is a humour-character. He looks like a clown. His encounter with John Johnson and Tom has been humorously conceived. To some extent Mrs Noakes is also a humour-character. Mr Owen Overton, the Mayor, is also a humour character. His presence, utterances and above all dealings with other characters tickle the audience. Will, the third waiter, is also a humour-character. Consider his funny description of the Strange Gentleman. Again, Tom Sparks is a superb entertainer. In fact, his sense of humour deserves special attention. His verbal expressions may be recalled in this context. When the Strange Gentleman wants to know from him whether he is a boot or not, he says that he is "the head o' that branch o' the establishment" (13). The spectators also burst into laughter as Fanny and Mary meet John Johnson and the latter feels that 'insult' may mar 'marriage vows'. In The Strange Gentleman Dickens has employed picturesque language and made some unforgettable situations which evoke

laughter and fun. The old man, who is alleged to behave like a lunatic, is actually a man of perfect sensitivity. The plan itself is funny, and again the shifting scene is also full of fun. There are several incidents in the play produce situational humour. The scene where the old man bolts Mrs. Noakes inside to talk to her privately may be taken as an example of situational humour. Again, the way Julia and the Strange Gentleman try to conceal their identities is also full of fun. Most situational humour in this play emerge from either misunderstanding or mistaken identities. The mock serious verbal exchange between Mary and the Strange Gentleman is also a source of situational humour. Actually, Mary mistakes the Strange Gentleman for Lord Peter. This mistaken identity evokes laughter in our heart.

An interesting aspect of Dickens's dramatic use of verbal humour is the skill with which he creates a deliberate ambiguity which leads to all kind of confusion. Indirect use of words and phrases like 'the lady', 'her', 'the other party' etc. are instances in point. We become aware of this ambiguous quality of the phrases when Mary meets the Strange Gentleman as her sister's lover :

MARY : You have arrived at this house in pursuit of a young lady, if I mistake not ?

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : You are quite right, ma'am (Aside)  
Mysterious female!

MARY : If you are the gentleman I'm in search of, you wrote a hasty note a short time since, stating that you would be found here this afternoon.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : (drawing back his chair). I-I-Wrote a note, ma'am!

MARY : You need keep nothing secret from me, Sir. I know all.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN (aside). That villain, Boots, has betrayed me! Know all, ma'am ?

MARY : Everything.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN (aside) : It must be so. She's constable's wife(17).

MARY : You are the writer of that letter, Sir ? I think I am not mistaken.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : You are not, ma'am; I confess I did write it. What was I to do, ma'am ? Consider the situation in which I was placed.

MARY : In your situation, you had, as it appears to me, only one course to pursue.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN. You mean the course I adopted ?

MARY. • Undoubtedly.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : I am very happy to hear you say so,  
though of course I should like it to be kept a secret.

MARY. • Oh, of course.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN (Drawing his chair close to her, and  
speaking very softly). Will you allow me to ask you,  
whether the constables are downstairs ?

MARY. • (Surprised). The constables!

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : Because if I am to be apprehended, I  
should like to have it over. I am quite ready, if  
it must be done.

MARY. • No legal interference has been attempted. There is  
nothing to prevent your continuing your Journey to  
- night.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : But will not the other party follow ?

MARY : (Looking down). The other party, I am compelled  
to inform you, is detained here by-by want of funds.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN (starting up) : Detained here by want of  
funds! Hurrah! Hurrah! I have caged him at last.  
I'm revenged for all his blustering and bullying.  
This is glorious triumph, ha, ha, ha ! I have  
nailed him - nailed him to the spot :(16).

The Critical Estimate

The Strange Gentleman is a strange concoction indeed. The well-worn machinery of farce can be detected rattling and squeaking and the number of "asides" is prodigious. Harley has one explanatory soliloquy of over 500 words, another of 200 words, and so on. It says much for his art that he carried the role so well. As the very first of Dickens's plays to be put on at a public theatre, the cast, as printed, is worth preserving, if only as a museum piece. The constant repetition of the "St James's Arms" after the description of each character works as though it were intend as cumulative reminder of the theatre itself - a "psychological advertisement."

Although, technically the play may not be strictly called a burletta, it is full of Dickensian humour. The most important comic device employed by Dickens in this play is mistaken identity. Both Julia and Owen Overton mistake The Strange Gentleman as Lord Peter and think him to be an extremely passionate man. They think that Mr Trot of The Strange Gentleman is only a disguised name of Lord Peter.

Julia's plan to ask Lord Peter to play the Lunatic is just the thing required for the humorously pathetic situation of Mr Trot whose most original and true sincerity is regarded by overton as an excellent performance. He considers it as an expression or real 'passion' and an admirable 'Joke' in itself. Noakes who is actually made to believe that this Strange Gentleman is mad contributes to the humour of situation with her exclamation :

MRS NOAKES (R.H.). Poor dear ! Mad people always think other people mad (27).

The humour is further intensified by the Strange Gentleman's appeal to the Mayor to secure the one-eyed boots which the Mayor construes as a hint for being sent to his bed room :

STRANGE GENGLEMAN. Mr. Mayor, I call upon you to issue your warrant for the instant confinement of that one-eyed Orson in some place of security (28).

Another aspect of the humour of situation is cleverly exploited by Dickens through his setting. Room No. 23 is Strange Gentleman's bed room and one is made aware of his presence inside by his pair of boots lying at the door. Fanny is under the impression that they are Charles Tomkins's boots. Tomkins on the other hand has noticed the pair of

boots at the entrance of the Room No. 23 and he suspects that his rival whom he supposes to be Fanny's lover must be sleeping in the same Room No. 23 and his confusion becomes worse confounded when he notices another pair of boots outside Room No. 24, the Room where Mary's lover John Johnson has put up.

It is evident that the coincidences arising out of the arrival of three sets of people all planning to get Gretna green has been dramatically exploited to the extent that all the people are confused. It is for this reason that the hasty note which Fanny receives from Tomkins and the mysterious note which Julia has asked Lord Peter to write have both been confused with the Strange Gentleman's anonymous letter. The confusion with "the other party" is best seen in the conversation between The Strange Gentleman and Overton :

STRANGE GENTLEMAN. I thought I was managing properly.

I understood the other party was detained here, by want of funds.

OVERTON : Want of funds! There's no want of funds in that quarter, I can tell you.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : An't there, though ?

OVERTON : Bless you, no. Three thousand a year! - But who told you there was a want of funds ?

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : Why, she did.

OVERTON : She! you have seen her then ? She told me  
you had not.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : Nonsense; don't believe her, she  
was in this very room half an hour ago.

OVERTON : Then I must have misunderstood her, and you  
must have misunderstood her too. - But to  
return to business. Don't you think it would  
keep up appearances if I had you put under some  
restraint.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : I think it would. I am very much  
obliged to you — (24).

Humour also springs naturally when Overton tries to  
put the Strange Gentleman under restraint for feigned  
madness. The Strange Gentleman takes it to be an excellent  
response to his anonymous letter sent to Overton. The entire  
situation becomes charged with rollicking fun when the  
Strange Gentleman is again confused :

STRANGE GENTLEMAN. Yes-Yes-I say, what a queer room  
this is of mine. Somebody has been tapping at  
the wall for the last half hour, like a whole  
forest of wood-peckers.

OVERTON. Don't you know who that was ?

STRANGE GENTLEMAN. No.

OVERTON. The other party.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN (alarmed). The other party !

OVERTON. To be sure - The other party is going  
with you.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : Going with me! - In the  
same chaise ! (36).

The above illustrations bear testimony to Dickens's superb craftsmanship. Indeed, he is not only a humorist but a creator of innovative plots and situations.