

No. 1.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

THE LIFE OF  
*DANIEL DANCER Esq.,*

THE REMARKABLE MISER.

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A Selection of  
Amusing and Instructive  
**READING;**

COMPRISING THE  
WONDERS OF NATURE AND ART,

WITH

*MEMOIRS AND ANECDOTES*

OF

*Singular & Eccentric Characters,*

*HISTORICAL FACTS, AND*

*GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTIONS, &c., &c.,*

*Collected from Costly and Rare Works,*

BY JOHN NICHOLSON,

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## DANIEL DANCER.

DANIEL DANCER was born in 1716, in the hamlet of Weald, in the neighbourhood of Harrow. He was descended from a respectable yeoman's family in the county of Hertford, and his grandfather appears to have been settled at Bushy, near Watford, where he followed the profitable occupations of mealman and maltster. His father who resided at Stone-causeway, on Harrow Weald Common, possessed considerable property in land, which he farmed himself: he had four children, three sons and a daughter; and on his death, in 1736, his eldest son Daniel succeeded to the estate.

It has somewhere been asserted, that there never yet were three successive generations of misers; the Daneers, however, form a special exception to this rule, for it is an undoubted fact, that the grandfather, the father, and all the children, were strictly entitled to this appellation! Their characters, however, were of a peculiar cast; for it was the ambition and the occupation of their lives, not to accumulate for the sake of their offspring, or relatives, or posterity, or themselves, but from the same principle that the magpie is said to steal gold—merely for the pleasure of *hiding* it!

The contemporaries of the grandfather are now no more, and but few traditional anec-

dotes have been handed down concerning him. But Daniel was satisfied that his father had concealed money to the amount of more than one thousand five hundred pounds in the premises occupied by him; and this occasioned no little uneasiness; but it did not proceed from the fear of its not being discovered, but from the dread lest his brothers might find it, and not deliver it to him. This rendered him cautious of mentioning his suspicions; and it was full two years before any part of it was found. At length, on removing an old gate, about two hundred pounds in gold and bank notes, which had been concealed between two pewter dishes under one of the posts, were fortunately disinterred. The rest was never heard of.

It was in the paternal mansion at Astmis, at Causeway-gate, on Harrow Weald Common, that Daniel was doomed by the fates to spend the whole of his life, which seems to have been one uninterrupted dreary blank.— His wretched habitation was surrounded by about eighty acres of his own rich meadow land, with some of the finest oak timber in the kingdom upon it; and he possessed an adjoining farm, called Waldos; the whole of the annual value of about two hundred and fifty pounds per annum, if properly cultivated. But cultivation was so expensive, and so Daniel permitted grass only to grow

there ; indeed, in so neglected a state was the place for many years, that the house was entirely surrounded by trees, the fields choaked up with underwood, and the hedges of such an amazing height as wholly to exclude the prospect of mankind, and create a dreary gloom all around.

Dancer's *house* exhibited a complete picture of misery and desolation. Among other odd circumstances, a tree had actually pushed its top through the roof, and contributed not a little, by means of its branches, to shelter the wretched inhabitants from the inclemency of the weather.

Dancer had a sister, who lived with him till her death, and whose disposition exactly corresponded with his own. The fare of this saving couple was invariably the same. On a Sunday they boiled a sticking of beef, with fourteen hard dumplings which always lasted during the whole week ; an arrangement which no consideration could scarcely induce them to alter, excepting through some circumstances like the following. Dancer accustomed himself to wander over the common in search of any stray locks of wool, cast-horse shoes, old iron, or pieces of paper, and even to collect the dung of sheep under the hedges. In one of these perambulations, he found a sheep which had died from natural disease ; this prize he instantly threw over his shoulder and

carried home, when after being skinned and cut up, Miss Dancer made it into a number of pies, of which they were extremely frugal while they lasted.

Had not Mis Dancer lived in an enlightened age, she would most certainly have run the risk of incurring the penalties inflicted on those unhappy wretches accused of witchcraft; so perfectly did her appearance agree with the ideas attached to a witch. She seldom stirred out of her miserable hut, except when alarmed by the cries of huntsmen and hounds: on such occasions she used to sally forth, armed with a pitchfork, with which she endeavoured to repel the progress of these intruders on her brother's grounds; and her appearance was rather that of a moving mass of rags, than of a human being.

During her last illness, her brother was frequently requested to procure medical assistance for her. His reply was, "Why should I waste my money, in wickedly endeavouring to counteract the will of Providence? If the old girl's time is come, the nostrums of all the quacks in Christendom cannot save her: and she may as well die now as at any future period." Of lawyers and physicians he entertained a very unfavourable opinion. Sooner than have any connexion with a lawyer, he said, he would deal with the devil: and to use his own expression, "All the gentlemen of

the faculty are medical tinkers, who, in endeavouring to patch up one blemish in the human frame, never fail to make ten." He thought bellows-makers, undertakers, and trunk makers very extravagant fellows, on account of their great waste of nails, which profusion he thought unnecessary.

The only food he offered his sister during her indisposition was her usual allowance of cold dumpling and sticking of beef, accompanied with the affectionate declaration, that if she did not like it she might go without. The kindness of Lady Tempest and Captain Holmes, who inherited the whole of Mr Dancer's fortune, made ample amends for her brother's inhumanity, and soothed her dying moments. In consideration of her tenderness, Miss Dancer intended to have left Lady Tempest the property she possessed, to the amount of 2000*l*. She, however, expired before she signed her will, which she had directed to be made, on which her two other brothers who were equally celebrated for parsimony, put in their claim for a share of her fortune. To this proposal Daniel refused to accede, and a law suit ensued; the result was, that he recovered 1040*l*. of his sister's property, as the price of her board for thirty years, at 3*l*. per annum, and 100*l*. for the two last years, in which he declared she had done nothing but eat and lie in bed. What remained after

these deductions was equally divided among the three brothers.

Although Daniel never evinced any affection for his sister, he determined to bury her in such a manner as should not *disgrace the family*. He accordingly contracted with an undertaker, who agreed to take timber in return for a coffin, as Mr Dancer had no idea of using the *precious metals* as a vehicle of exchange: he, however, could not be prevailed upon to purchase proper mourning for himself: yet, in consequence of the entreaty of his neighbours, he unbound the haybands with which his legs were usually covered, and drew on a second hand pair of black worsted stockings. His coat was of a whitish-brown colour; his waistcoat had been black about the middle of the last century; and the immediate covering to his head, which seemed to have been taken from Mr Elwes's *wiggery*, and to have descended to Daniel as an *heir loom*, gave a grotesque appearance to the person of a chief mourner, but too well calculated to provoke mirth. This, indeed, was increased by the slipping of his horse's girth at the place of burial; in consequence of which the rider, to the great diversion of some of the Harrow boys who attended, was precipitated into the grave!

After the death of his sister, and near the close of his own life, finding himself lone-

some, he hired a man for his companion, who was a proper counterpart of himself. This servant, Griffiths, had, by severe parsimony, contrived to accumulate 500*l.* out of wages which had never exceeded 10*l.* per annum.— At the time he hired with Mr Dancer, he was about sixty years of age, and his wages were *eighteen pence* per week. He assisted his master in picking up bones, &c., accordingly, when they went out, they took different roads for the same purpose; but Griffiths having a taste for strong beer would tipple a little, which was the cause of much altercation at night, when he returned home to his master.

From a principle of rigid economy, Mr Dancer rarely washed his hands and face; and when he did, it was always without the assistance of either soap or towel. Dispensing with those articles of expensive luxury, he used, when the sun shone, to repair to a neighbouring pool, and after washing himself with sand, he would lie on his back in the sun to dry himself. His tattered garments, which were scarcely sufficient to cover his nakedness, were kept together by a strong hay-band, which he fastened round his body. His stockings were so patched, that not a vestige of the original could be perceived, and in cold and dirty weather he wound about his legs ropes of hay, so that his whole figure present-



ed the most striking picture of misery that can possibly be conceived.

At one period of his life, he used annually to purchase two shirts, but for several years preceding his death, he allowed himself only one. This he bought at some old clothes shop, and seldom exceeded half-a-crown in price.— After coming into his possession, it never underwent the operations of washing or mending, nor did he ever change it till it dropped from his back in rags. In making one of these purchases, he was involved in an affair which gave him no small trouble and uneasiness.— Being desired by the mistress of a shop, to which he went to purchase an old shirt, to mention his price, he told her, “as much under three shillings as possible.” A shirt was accordingly produced, for which, after bargaining a long time, Dancer, as he declared, agreed to give two shillings and ninepence. He gave the woman three shillings, and waited for the change, but to his mortification and surprise, she refused to give any, positively asserting, that he had agreed to take the shirt at the price she had received. Remonstrances were vain, and to suffer such a diminution of his property without endeavouring to obtain redress, he regarded as criminal. He therefore summoned the woman to a court of conscience, and to support his claim made two journeys to town; but after a full hearing, the poor man

was not only nonsuited, but obliged to pay the coasts of the court, to the *enormous* amount of five shillings. To add to his vexation, his two journeys had put him to the additional expence of three-pence more: for it can scarcely be supposed that a man of his age and wealth could travel on foot fifteen miles, and back again on the same day, without the extraordinary indulgence of a penny-worth of bread and cheese, and a half-penny-worth of small beer. At this time Mr Dancer was in the possession of property to the amount of 3000*l.* a year!

When his sister died, he had a pair of sheets on his bed, which he would never suffer to be removed: but lay in them till they were worn out. He would not allow his house to be cleaned, and the room in which he lived was nearly filled with sticks he had collected from his neighbours' hedges. He was for many years his own cobbler, and the last pair of shoes he wore had become so large and ponderous, from the frequent soles and coverings they had received, that they rather resembled hog-troughs than shoes.

Such was his attention to parsimony in every thing that could in the smallest degree contribute to his advantage, that when obliged to relieve the wants of nature, he would rather walk two miles than not assist in manuring his own lands. He gathered in his rambles

all the bones he met with, and rather than return home empty-handed, he would load himself with the dung of the cattle on the common. The bones he first picked himself, and then broke in pieces for his dog Bob. His conduct to this favourite, whom he always called, "Bob my child," affords a striking instance of human inconsistency; for while he himself would swill the pot-liquor of Lady Tempest's kitchen, to save the expence of a penny, Bob was allowed a pint of milk daily. His affection for this domestic was, nevertheless, overpowered by a consideration which, with him, carried irresistible weight. Complaints were made to him that Bob had worried some sheep: on this he took the dog to a blacksmith's shop, where he ordered all his teeth to be broken off short, to prevent a repetition of the mischief, for which he might probably have been compelled to make compensation.

Snuff was a luxury in which it is natural to suppose that he never indulged; yet he always begged a pinch from those who did.— In this manner he used in about a month to fill a snuff-box, which he always carried in his pocket. He then exchanged its contents at a chandler's shop for a farthing candle, which was made to last till he had again filled his box, as he never suffered any light in his house, except when he was going to bed. A

horse which he kept for some time was never allowed more than two shoes, for his fore-feet to shoe the hind feet, being, in his opinion — an unnecessary expense.

His wealth was thus productive of no other enjoyment than the sordid and unavailing one arising from the contemplation of riches which he did not dare to enjoy; on the contrary it seemed to carry a curse along with it, and to engender a variety of calamities to the wretched possessor. During the time he lived alone after the death of his sister (for he never could prevail upon himself to be at the *expense* of a wife,) the temptation to rob the old miser proved irresistible to those who lived by rapine; indeed there is some reason to suppose that they contemplated the plunder of a man of his penurious disposition with but little compunction or remorse: his avarice, if not an excuse for, at least seemed an alleviation of the crime. He was, accordingly, robbed frequently, and, if report be true—for this was a subject on which he did not choose to enlarge—to a very considerable amount. He however, once confessed, with tears in his eyes to his niece, who had seen whole and half pecks of halfpence on his staircase, that “all — all was gone.!”

On these occasions it was customary with the house-breakers to terrify him into a discovery of his more valuable property; and

they are said to have actually suspended him by the neck several times, before they could extort a confession where it was deposited.

At length, Daniel bethought himself of a mode of preventing their visits, and punishing their temerity. After fastening his rotten door on the inside, in the best manner possible, he determined never to enter the house again through that aperture. Accordingly he procured a short ladder, always ascended by its means, and pulling it in after him, took refuge in his miserable apartment, where he literally resembled Robinson Crusoe shut up in his little garrison.

But not deeming this sufficient, he actually dug a hole, or, what military men term a *trou de loup*, before the entrance, which he covered over with loose straw, in such a manner as to secure the principal approach towards his castle, and entrap any incautions assailant, who might have the temerity to invade his darling property. After exhibiting this specimen of his talents as an engineer, the modern Midas seems to have slept in safety amidst his gold.

Soon after the robbery, the thieves were apprehended, and as Mr Dancer's presence at their trial became necessary, Lady Tempest begged his acceptance of a clean shirt, that he might make a decent appearance; but he declined the generous offer, assuring her that

he had a new one on, which he had bought only three weeks before, when it was *quite clean*.

This accident probably made some impression, and rendered him desirous of placing his money in a more secure situation than his own wretched hut. Repairing not long after to London, to invest 2000*l.* in the funds, a gentleman who met him near the Exchange, mistaking him for a beggar, put a penny into his hand. Though somewhat surprised at first, yet recollecting that every little helps, he put the money into his pocket and continued his walk.

Lady Tempest who was the only person that had any influence on the mind of this unhappy man, employed every possible persuasion and device to induce him to partake of those conveniences and comforts which are so gratifying to others, but without effect. One day she, however, prevailed on him to purchase a hat of a Jew for a shilling, that which he wore having been in constant use for thirteen years. She called upon him the next day, and to her surprise found that he still continued to wear the old one. On enquiring the reason, he, after much solicitation, informed her, that his old servant Griffiths, had given him sixpence profit for his bargain.

The same lady, knowing that he was fond of trout stewed in claret, once sent him some

as a present. The stew had become congealed during the night, and though he durst not eat till it was warmed for fear of the tooth-ache, to which he was subject, yet he could not on any account afford the expence of a fire. The ingenious method by which he contrived to relieve himself from this embarrassment, is certainly worthy of admiration.—The weather was frosty, and at such times he always lay in bed to keep himself warm, and he conceived that a similar mode of proceeding would produce the same effect on the fish. He accordingly directed it to be put, with the sauce, into a pewter plate, and covering it with another, placed them under his body, and sat upon them till the contents were sufficiently warmed!

The latter part of Daniel's life was meliorated by the humanity and good-nature of his worthy and respectable neighbour. Lady Tempest presented him with a bed, and, at length actually prevailed upon him to throw away the sack in which he had slept for years. Being a sworn enemy to extravagance, he was careful to excess of the property of another. He could scarcely be prevailed upon, it is said, to touch a joint. He delighted in fragments and crusts; and, while indulging himself in these *luxuries*, muttered execrations against the devouring gluttony of modern times. He also evinced, on this occasion, a considerable

portion of that low cunning so common in illiterate persons; for he pretended to pay his addresses to the cook, in an *honourable way*, with a view of keeping in favour with her; and, when it was evident that she had discovered his intentions to proceed from what is termed *cupboard love*, he endeavoured to impose on her a second time, by promising to remember her in his will!

To his brother who kept sheep on the same common, and who rivalled Daniel himself in penury, and almost in wealth, he always manifested the utmost aversion; to his niece, however, he once presented a guinea on the birth of a daughter; but even here he made a hard bargain, for the gift was conditional—she was either to name the child Nancy, after his mother, or forfeit the *whole sum*.

To the honour of Mr Dancer, however, he possessed one virtue, and that, too, not a very common one in this world—gratitude. Accordingly, some time before his death, he made a will, and surrendered his copyhold estates to the disposition he had made; the will and surrender were both in favour of his benefactress, Lady Tempest.

The evening before his death, he dispatched a messenger in whom he cou'd confide, requesting to see her ladyship, and on being gratified in this particular, he expressed great sa-



tisfaction. Finding himself a little better, his attachment to the only thing he respected more than that lady recurred, and that too with such violence, that, although his hand was scarcely able to perform its functions, he took hold of his will, which he had intended to have presented to her, and replaced it once more in his bosom.

Next morning, however, perceiving his end to be fast approaching, he actually confided this paper according to his original determination; and, having now resigned, as it were, all title to that adored wealth, which he considered as his "heart's blood," he soon gave up the ghost, and was buried in the churchyard of his parish (Harrow,) by his own particular desire.

Thus lived, and thus died, at the age of seventy-eight, on September 4, 1794, Daniel Dancer, a true disciple of the Elwes school, the rigours of which he practised to a far greater degree than even his master. In consequence of a very common mistake of the *means* for the *end*, he deprived himself not only of what are termed the pleasures, but even of the necessaries of life. At times, however, he would lament that he did not make a better use of his riches; and was once heard to regret that he had not, according to his original intentions, set up a whiskey, which, in his opinion, was the *ne plus ultra* of gen-

tility. On another occasion, upon receiving two-pence for a pint of beer from a deputy commissary, who was about to pay him five hundred pounds for hay during the war, and had mistaken him for one of 'Squire Dancer's servants, he bridled up, and said that he intended soon to become a gentleman himself!

Had it not been for the perpetual exercise of his master-passion, Daniel Dancer might have been a credit to his family, and an ornament to society. He possessed the seeds of many admirable qualities, and exhibited frequent marks of strong, nervous, good sense; unpolished, indeed, by commerce with the world, but at the same time unsophisticated by its vices or its follies.

Both he and his father, during a series of more than sixty years, had allowed themselves two jubilee days in the year, these were their festivals, and they enjoyed them, for there was good cheer to be had without expense. The periods alluded to occurred in April and October, at Sir John Rushout's court-baron for the manor of Harrow. As head tenants, they constantly attended; and it was observed by all the suitors, that, if the Dancers starved at home, they ate most voraciously abroad. On these occasions Daniel distinguished himself by his droll sayings; and, whenever any attempt was made to ridicule, burlesque, or pass a joke upon him (which was invariably the case,) the

wit and eccentricity of his replies soon put his antagonist to silence.

No man had more of the true Englishman about him, at least so far as concerned the defence of his rights and privileges, than Mr Dancer. He was a second Hampden in this respect; for, during the whole of his life, he would never permit any infringement on Harrow Weald Common. Whenever an encroachment took place, without any respect to rank or fortune, Daniel instantly headed the villagers, and abated the nuisance. This made him extremely popular.

Miserable and wretched as his disposition was, he was not accused of having ever committed any act of injustice; on the contrary, he was sometimes known to have assisted those whose style of living and appearance were infinitely superior to his own.

He had no farming business but during the time of mowing his meadows. That of his hay harvest, then, seems to have been the only period of the year in which his mind was occupied by business: and this, too was the sole time in which jollity appeared to be familiar to his mansion; for he seemed then to have entirely divested himself of his natural character. No gentleman in the neighbourhood gave his mowers better beer, or in greater quantity, than Daniel did on this occasion. It was brought from a neighbouring brew-

house ; for at this time only was the beverage of our Saxon forefathers to be found within his walls. Notwithstanding the miserable aspect of the house and its inhabitants, both brother and sister (the former especially, who was nearly naked,) yet on Daniel's death not only plate, table linen, and twenty four pair good sheets, but clothes of every description, were found locked up in chests. The female attire, of which there was a correct inventory. In the brother's own hand writing, was valued at *seventeen pounds*. He also, among other apparel, had some excellent *boots*; but he preferred to *case* his legs with the still warmer covering of hay bands.

Although he possessed two ancient but tolerably good bedsteads, with the proper furniture, originally belonging, as well as the house, to the Edlins, a family of some property, yet they were carefully secluded from the light of heaven, and both he and his sister slept on sacks stuffed with hay, and covered with a horse rug.

During the last twenty years, Daniel's house is said to have been entered at least fourteen times by thieves, and the amount of his losses is calculated at 2,500*l*. As the lower part was in such a ruinous state as to admit a person with ease, it was recommended to him to get it repaired; but he replied, "that this would be only throwing away more money"

for then they would get in at the windows."

In order to employ the attention of the marauders, until he should escape to his hiding place, he was accustomed to strew the ground floor with farthings and sixpences wrapped up in paper.

Dancer, about six years before his death, during a hot summer's day, was observed by a neighbour very assiduously employed in throwing water from a pool, by means of a frying-pan, on the surrounding meadow which happened to be burnt up. On being questioned as to the object of his labours, he observed, 'that he wanted a bit of nice fresh grass for his old horse, for hay being then very dear, a poor body ought to be sparing of it.' The same person, returning in three or four hours afterwards found the old man in tears, and, on inquiring the cause was informed, "that he had worked with the frying pan until he was tired, when falling asleep on the grass, some rogue had stolen a pocket-book from him containing three hundred and fifty pounds in bank notes, which he had received the day before for some ricks of hay that he sold."

Having been once reluctantly bound over by a magistrate to prosecute a horse stealer at Aylesbury assizes, he set out with a respectable neighbour, who undertook to accompany him. Himself and his horse, on this occasion exhibited a grotesque appearance, for the

movements of the latter were regulated by a halter instead of a bridle, while a sack fastened round him served instead of a saddle: as for shoes, this was a luxury that Daniel's Rosinante had never been accustomed to.

On their arrival at Aylesbury, having stopped at an inn of decent appearance, Dancer addressed his companion in the following manner:—"Pray, Sir, do you go into the house, order what you please, and live like a gentleman, I will settle for it readily; but as for myself I must go on in my old way." He accordingly did so, for he bought a pennyworth of bread for himself, slept under his horse's manger, and paid fifteen shillings, being the amount of his companion's bill, with the utmost cheerfulness.

His house, which at his death devolved to Captain Holmes, was a most miserable building, not having been repaired for half a century: though poor in external appearance, it was, however, discovered to be very rich within; at different times, Captain Holmes found large bowels filled with guineas and half-guineas, and parcels of bank-notes stuffed under the covers of old chairs. Large jugs of dollars and shillings were found in the stable. At the dead of night Mr Dancer was known to go to this place, but for what purpose no one could tell. It afterwards appeared that he used to rob one jug, to add to a bowl which

was found buried in the kitchen.

It took many weeks to explore the contents of his dwelling. One of his richest escrutoirs was the dung-heap in the cow-house, which contained near 2,500*l* and in an old jacket carefully tied, and strongly nailed down to the manger, was the sum of 500*l*. in gold and bank-notes. In the chimney was about 200*l*. and an old tea pot contained bank-notes to the value of 600*l*.; it was covered with a piece of paper, whimsically inscribed, "not to be hastily looked over."

There was likewise found some hundred weight of waste paper, the collection of half a century, and two or three tons of old iron, consisting of nails, horse-shoes, &c., which he had picked up. On the ground floor several pieces of foreign gold and silver were dug up and some coins, among which were a crown and a shilling of the English commonwealth.

He left in landed property to the amount of 500*l*. per annum to Lady Tempest, and after her death to her only son, Sir Henry Tempest, of Stoke-end, Hereford: in short the whole property which he left to Lady Tempest and her brother Captain Holmes, was about 3000*l*. per annum. Lady Tempest did not long enjoy the accession of wealth, which she acquired by this miser's death; for she contracted an illness during her attendance upon Mr Daner in his last hours, that

in a few months terminated her own life, in January, 1795.

Notwithstanding his great penury, Mr Dancer possessed some praiseworthy qualities. He observed the most rigid integrity in every transaction, and was never averse to assist those of whom he entertained a good opinion, and whose embarrassments required a temporary aid; but, at the same time, it must be confessed, he did not lend his money without expecting the usual interest. His servant, Griffiths, always fared much better than his master, having been indulged with whatever he chose to eat and drink, besides a good and comfortable bed to sleep on. The latter Mr Dancer deemed an unnecessary luxury, yet his allowing his servant that which he denied himself, renders his character still more wonderful and unaccountable.

Dancer left two brothers, Henry and Hammon, both possessed of property, and both genuine misers.