



# Learn English Through Stories

**Adapted and modified by**

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## The Beadle. The Parish Engine. The Schoolmaster

How much is conveyed in those two short words—‘The Parish!’ And with how many tales of distress and misery, of broken fortune and ruined hopes, too often of unrelieved wretchedness and successful knavery, are they associated! A poor man, with small earnings, and a large family, just manages to live on from hand to mouth, and to procure food from day to day; he has barely sufficient to satisfy the present cravings of nature, and can take no heed of the future. His taxes are in arrear, quarter-day passes by, another quarter-day arrives: he can procure no more quarter for himself, and is summoned by—the parish. His goods are distrained, his children are crying with cold and hunger, and the very bed on which his sick wife is lying, is dragged from beneath her. What can he do? To whom is he to apply for relief? To private charity? To benevolent individuals? Certainly not—there is his parish. There are the parish vestry, the parish infirmary, the parish surgeon, the parish officers, the parish beadle. Excellent institutions, and gentle, kind-hearted men. The woman dies—she is buried by the parish. The children have no protector—they are taken care of by the parish. The man first neglects, and afterwards cannot obtain, work—he is relieved by the parish; and when distress and drunkenness have done their work upon him, he is maintained, a harmless babbling idiot, in the parish asylum.

The parish beadle is one of the most, perhaps the most, important member of the local administration. He is not so well off as the churchwardens, certainly, nor is he so learned as the vestry-clerk, nor does he order things quite so much his own way as either of them. But his power is very great, notwithstanding; and the dignity of his office is never impaired by the absence of efforts on his part to maintain it. The beadle of our parish is a splendid fellow. It is quite delightful to hear him, as he explains the state of the existing poor laws to the deaf old women in the board-room passage on business nights; and to hear what he said to the senior churchwarden, and what the senior churchwarden said to him; and what ‘we’ (the beadle and the other gentlemen) came to the determination of doing. A miserable-looking woman is called into the boardroom, and represents a case of extreme destitution, affecting herself—a widow, with six small children. ‘Where do you live?’ inquires one of the overseers. ‘I rents a two-pair back, gentlemen, at Mrs. Brown’s, Number 3, Little King William’s-alley, which has lived there this fifteen year, and knows

me to be very hard-working and industrious, and when my poor husband was alive, gentlemen, as died in the hospital'—'Well, well,' interrupts the overseer, taking a note of the address, 'I'll send Simmons, the beadle, to-morrow morning, to ascertain whether your story is correct; and if so, I suppose you must have an order into the House—Simmons, go to this woman's the first thing to-morrow morning, will you?' Simmons bows assent, and ushers the woman out. Her previous admiration of 'the board' (who all sit behind great books, and with their hats on) fades into nothing before her respect for her lace-trimmed conductor; and her account of what has passed inside, increases—if that be possible—the marks of respect, shown by the assembled crowd, to that solemn functionary. As to taking out a summons, it's quite a hopeless case if Simmons attends it, on behalf of the parish. He knows all the titles of the Lord Mayor by heart; states the case without a single stammer: and it is even reported that on one occasion he ventured to make a joke, which the Lord Mayor's head footman (who happened to be present) afterwards told an intimate friend, confidentially, was almost equal to one of Mr. Hobler's.

See him again on Sunday in his state-coat and cocked-hat, with a large-headed staff for show in his left hand, and a small cane for use in his right. How pompously he marshals the children into their places! and how demurely the little urchins look at him askance as he surveys them when they are all seated, with a glare of the eye peculiar to beadles! The churchwardens and overseers being duly installed in their curtained pews, he seats himself on a mahogany bracket, erected expressly for him at the top of the aisle, and divides his attention between his prayer-book and the boys. Suddenly, just at the commencement of the communion service, when the whole congregation is hushed into a profound silence, broken only by the voice of the officiating clergyman, a penny is heard to ring on the stone floor of the aisle with astounding clearness. Observe the generalship of the beadle. His involuntary look of horror is instantly changed into one of perfect indifference, as if he were the only person present who had not heard the noise. The artifice succeeds. After putting forth his right leg now and then, as a feeler, the victim who dropped the money ventures to make one or two distinct dives after it; and the beadle, gliding softly round, salutes his little round head, when it again appears above the seat, with divers double knocks, administered with the cane before noticed, to the intense delight of three young men in an adjacent pew, who cough violently at intervals until the conclusion of the sermon.

Such are a few traits of the importance and gravity of a parish beadle—a gravity which has never been disturbed in any case that has come under our observation, except when the services of that particularly useful machine, a parish fire-engine, are required: then indeed all is bustle. Two little boys run to the beadle as fast as their legs will carry them, and report from their own personal observation that some neighbouring chimney is on fire; the engine is hastily got out, and a plentiful supply of boys being obtained, and harnessed to it with ropes, away they rattle over the pavement, the beadle, running—we do not exaggerate—running at the side, until they arrive at some house, smelling strongly of soot, at the door of which the beadle knocks with considerable gravity for half-an-hour. No attention being paid to these manual applications, and the turn-cock having turned on the water, the engine turns off amidst the shouts of the boys; it pulls up once more at the work-house, and the beadle ‘pulls up’ the unfortunate householder next day, for the amount of his legal reward. We never saw a parish engine at a regular fire but once. It came up in gallant style—three miles and a half an hour, at least; there was a capital supply of water, and it was first on the spot. Bang went the pumps—the people cheered—the beadle perspired profusely; but it was unfortunately discovered, just as they were going to put the fire out, that nobody understood the process by which the engine was filled with water; and that eighteen boys, and a man, had exhausted themselves in pumping for twenty minutes, without producing the slightest effect!

The personages next in importance to the beadle, are the master of the workhouse and the parish schoolmaster. The vestry-clerk, as everybody knows, is a short, pudgy little man, in black, with a thick gold watch-chain of considerable length, terminating in two large seals and a key. He is an attorney, and generally in a bustle; at no time more so, than when he is hurrying to some parochial meeting, with his gloves crumpled up in one hand, and a large red book under the other arm. As to the churchwardens and overseers, we exclude them altogether, because all we know of them is, that they are usually respectable tradesmen, who wear hats with brims inclined to flatness, and who occasionally testify in gilt letters on a blue ground, in some conspicuous part of the church, to the important fact of a gallery having being enlarged and beautified, or an organ rebuilt.

The master of the workhouse is not, in our parish—nor is he usually in any other—one of that class of men the better part of whose existence has passed away, and who drag out the remainder in some inferior situation, with just

enough thought of the past, to feel degraded by, and discontented with the present. We are unable to guess precisely to our own satisfaction what station the man can have occupied before; we should think he had been an inferior sort of attorney's clerk, or else the master of a national school—whatever he was, it is clear his present position is a change for the better. His income is small certainly, as the rusty black coat and threadbare velvet collar demonstrate: but then he lives free of house-rent, has a limited allowance of coals and candles, and an almost unlimited allowance of authority in his petty kingdom. He is a tall, thin, bony man; always wears shoes and black cotton stockings with his surtout; and eyes you, as you pass his parlour-window, as if he wished you were a pauper, just to give you a specimen of his power. He is an admirable specimen of a small tyrant: morose, brutish, and ill-tempered; bullying to his inferiors, cringing to his superiors, and jealous of the influence and authority of the beadle.

Our schoolmaster is just the very reverse of this amiable official. He has been one of those men one occasionally hears of, on whom misfortune seems to have set her mark; nothing he ever did, or was concerned in, appears to have prospered. A rich old relation who had brought him up, and openly announced his intention of providing for him, left him 10,000 l. in his will, and revoked the bequest in a codicil. Thus unexpectedly reduced to the necessity of providing for himself, he procured a situation in a public office. The young clerks below him, died off as if there were a plague among them; but the old fellows over his head, for the reversion of whose places he was anxiously waiting, lived on and on, as if they were immortal. He speculated and lost. He speculated again and won—but never got his money. His talents were great; his disposition, easy, generous and liberal. His friends profited by the one, and abused the other. Loss succeeded loss; misfortune crowded on misfortune; each successive day brought him nearer the verge of hopeless penury, and the quondam friends who had been warmest in their professions, grew strangely cold and indifferent. He had children whom he loved, and a wife on whom he doted. The former turned their backs on him; the latter died broken-hearted. He went with the stream—it had ever been his failing, and he had not courage sufficient to bear up against so many shocks—he had never cared for himself, and the only being who had cared for him, in his poverty and distress, was spared to him no longer. It was at this period that he applied for parochial relief. Some kind-hearted man who had known him in happier times, chanced

to be churchwarden that year, and through his interest he was appointed to his present situation.

He is an old man now. Of the many who once crowded round him in all the hollow friendship of boon-companionship, some have died, some have fallen like himself, some have prospered—all have forgotten him. Time and misfortune have mercifully been permitted to impair his memory, and use has habituated him to his present condition. Meek, uncomplaining, and zealous in the discharge of his duties, he has been allowed to hold his situation long beyond the usual period; and he will no doubt continue to hold it, until infirmity renders him incapable, or death releases him. As the grey-headed old man feebly paces up and down the sunny side of the little court-yard between school hours, it would be difficult, indeed, for the most intimate of his former friends to recognise their once gay and happy associate, in the person of the Pauper Schoolmaster.

## The Parish: A Story of Three Men: Version 2

In England long ago, the parish was a system to help poor people. But it was often unkind and unfair. This story tells about three men in the parish: the beadle, the workhouse master, and the schoolmaster. Each man shows a different part of the parish and its problems.

### **The Poor Man's Story**

A poor man has a big family and little money. He works hard but can only buy food for each day. He has no money for the future. He cannot pay his taxes, and time passes. The parish calls him. They take his things, even the bed where his sick wife lies. His children are cold and hungry. He asks for help, but no one listens. He cannot go to kind people or friends—only the parish can help.

The parish has a vestry (a group of leaders), a hospital, a doctor, and a beadle. They seem kind, but they are not. The man's wife dies, and the parish buries her. His children go to the workhouse, a place for poor people. The man cannot find work. He drinks too much and becomes sick. The parish takes him to an asylum, where he lives as a weak, confused man.

### **The Parish Beadle**

The beadle is an important man in the parish. His name is Simmons. He is not as rich as the churchwardens or as smart as the vestry-clerk, but he has power. He likes to feel important.

Simmons does many jobs. On business nights, he talks to poor people, like old women, about the parish rules. He tells stories about what he said to the churchwarden and what "we" decided. Everyone respects him.

One day, a poor widow with six children comes to the vestry. She says she lives in a small room and works hard, but her husband died. The vestry leader writes her address and tells Simmons, "Go to her house tomorrow. Check if her story is true." Simmons nods and takes the woman out. The crowd outside admires him because he works for the parish. If Simmons helps with a court case, he speaks clearly and knows everything about the law. People say he even made a funny joke once!

On Sundays, Simmons wears a special coat and hat. He carries a big stick in one hand and a small cane in the other. He leads children into church and watches them. If a child drops a coin and makes noise, Simmons looks calm, but he hits the child with his cane. The children are afraid of him, and some boys laugh quietly.

Simmons is proud, but he is not always good at his job. One day, two boys run to him and say a house is on fire. Simmons gets the parish fire engine. Boys pull it with ropes, and Simmons runs beside it. They reach the house, but no one answers the door. The engine sprays water, but it doesn't work well. The boys shout, and Simmons looks busy, but the fire engine is useless. The next day, Simmons asks the house owner for money, even though he didn't help much.

### **The Workhouse Master**

The workhouse master runs the workhouse, where poor people live. He is a tall, thin man with old clothes. He lives in the workhouse for free and gets some coal and candles. He is not kind. He is rude, angry, and jealous of the beadle's power.

The master might have been a clerk or a teacher before. His job now is better, but he is not a good person. He looks at people as if he wants them to be poor so he can control them. In the workhouse, he is strict and treats people badly. He enjoys his power and doesn't care about their suffering.

### **The Schoolmaster**

The schoolmaster is very different. He teaches children in the parish school. His story is sad. Long ago, he was a smart and kind man. He had money and friends. A rich relative promised to give him money, but then took it away. The schoolmaster tried to work, but his bosses never retired, so he couldn't get a better job. He tried business, but he lost money. His friends used him and then left him. His wife died, and his children stopped talking to him.

The schoolmaster became poor and asked the parish for help. A kind man who knew him helped him get a job as a schoolmaster. Now, he is old and works hard to teach poor children. He is quiet and never complains. His memory is weak, and his old friends don't remember him. He walks slowly in the school courtyard, and no one knows he was once a happy man.