DICKENS CHARLES

MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT

Чарльз Диккенс

Martin Chuzzlewit

Диккенс Ч.

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Содержание

Charles Dickens
Life And Adventures Of Martin Chuzzlewit

PREFACE

What is exaggeration to one class of minds and perceptions, is plain truth to another. That which is commonly called a long-sight, perceives in a prospect innumerable features and bearings non-existent to a short-sighted person. I sometimes ask myself whether there may occasionally be a difference of this kind between some writers and some readers; whether it is *always* the writer who colours highly, or whether it is now and then the reader whose eye for colour is a little dull?

On this head of exaggeration I have a positive experience, more curious than the speculation I have just set down. It is this: I have never touched a character precisely from the life, but some counterpart of that character has incredulously asked me: “Now really, did I ever really, see one like it?”

All the Pecksniff family upon earth are quite agreed, I believe, that Mr Pecksniff is an exaggeration, and that no such character ever existed. I will not offer any plea on his behalf to so powerful and genteel a body, but will make a remark on the character of Jonas Chuzzlewit.

I conceive that the sordid coarseness and brutality of Jonas would be unnatural, if there had been nothing in his early education, and in the precept and example always before him, to engender and develop the vices that make him odious. But, so born and so bred, admired for that which made him hateful, and justified from his cradle in cunning, treachery, and avarice; I claim him as the legitimate issue of the father upon whom those vices are seen to recoil. And I submit that their recoil upon that old man, in his unhonoured age, is not a mere piece of poetical justice, but is the extreme exposition of a direct truth.

I make this comment, and solicit the reader’s attention to it in his or her consideration of this tale, because nothing is more common in real life than a want of profitable reflection on the causes of many vices and crimes that awaken the general horror. What is substantially true of families in this respect, is true of a whole commonwealth. As we sow, we reap. Let the reader go into the children’s side of any prison in England, or, I grieve to add, of many workhouses, and judge whether those are monsters who disgrace our streets, people our hulks and penitentiaries, and overcrowd our penal colonies, or are creatures whom we have deliberately suffered to be bred for misery and ruin.

The American portion of this story is in no other respect a caricature than as it is an exhibition, for the most part (Mr Bevan expected), of a ludicrous side, *only*, of the American character – of that side which was, four-and-twenty years ago, from its nature, the most obtrusive, and the most likely to be seen by such travellers as Young Martin and Mark Tapley. As I had never, in writing fiction, had any disposition to soften what is ridiculous or wrong at home, so I then hoped that the good-humored people of the United States would not be generally disposed to quarrel with me for carrying the same usage abroad. I am happy to believe that my confidence in that great nation was not misplaced.

When this book was first published, I was given to understand, by some authorities, that the Watertoast Association and eloquence were beyond all bounds of belief. Therefore I record the fact that all that portion of Martin Chuzzlewit’s experiences is a literal paraphrase of some reports of public proceedings in the United States (especially of the proceedings of a certain Brandywine Association), which were printed in the Times Newspaper in June and July, 1843 – at about the time when I was engaged in writing those parts of the book; and which remain on the file of the Times Newspaper, of course.

In all my writings, I hope I have taken every available opportunity of showing the want of sanitary improvements in the neglected dwellings of the poor. Mrs Sarah Gamp was, four-and-twenty

years ago, a fair representation of the hired attendant on the poor in sickness. The hospitals of London were, in many respects, noble Institutions; in others, very defective. I think it not the least among the instances of their mismanagement, that Mrs Betsey Prig was a fair specimen of a Hospital Nurse; and that the Hospitals, with their means and funds, should have left it to private humanity and enterprise, to enter on an attempt to improve that class of persons – since, greatly improved through the agency of good women.

POSTSCRIPT

At a Public Dinner given to me on Saturday the 18th of April, 1868, in the city of New York, by two hundred representatives of the Press of the United States of America, I made the following observations, among others: —

"So much of my voice has lately been heard in the land, that I might have been contented with troubling you no further from my present standing-point, were it not a duty with which I henceforth charge myself, not only here but on every suitable occasion, whatsoever and wheresoever, to express my high and grateful sense of my second reception in America, and to bear my honest testimony to the national generosity and magnanimity. Also, to declare how astounded I have been by the amazing changes I have seen around me on every side – changes moral, changes physical, changes in the amount of land subdued and peopled, changes in the rise of vast new cities, changes in the growth of older cities almost out of recognition, changes in the graces and amenities of life, changes in the Press, without whose advancement no advancement can take place anywhere. Nor am I, believe me, so arrogant as to suppose that in five-and-twenty years there have been no changes in me, and that I had nothing to learn and no extreme impressions to correct when I was here first. And this brings me to a point on which I have, ever since I landed in the United States last November, observed a strict silence, though sometimes tempted to break it, but in reference to which I will, with your good leave, take you into my confidence now. Even the Press, being human, may be sometimes mistaken or misinformed, and I rather think that I have in one or two rare instances observed its information to be not strictly accurate with reference to myself. Indeed, I have, now and again, been more surprised by printed news that I have read of myself, than by any printed news that I have ever read in my present state of existence. Thus, the vigour and perseverance with which I have for some months past been collecting materials for, and hammering away at, a new book on America has much astonished me; seeing that all that time my declaration has been perfectly well known to my publishers on both sides of the Atlantic, that no consideration on earth would induce me to write one. But what I have intended, what I have resolved upon (and this is the confidence I seek to place in you), is, on my return to England, in my own person, in my own Journal, to bear, for the behoof of my countrymen, such testimony to the gigantic changes in this country as I have hinted at to-night. Also, to record that wherever I have been, in the smallest places equally with the largest, I have been received with unsurpassable politeness, delicacy, sweet temper, hospitality, consideration, and with unsurpassable respect for the privacy daily enforced upon me by the nature of my avocation here and the state of my health. This testimony, so long as I live, and so long as my descendants have any legal right in my books, I shall cause to be republished, as an appendix to every copy of those two books of mine in which I have referred to America. And this I will do and cause to be done, not in mere love and thankfulness, but because I regard it as an act of plain justice and honour."

I said these words with the greatest earnestness that I could lay upon them, and I repeat them in print here with equal earnestness. So long as this book shall last, I hope that they will form a part of it, and will be fairly read as inseparable from my experiences and impressions of America.

CHARLES DICKENS.

May, 1868.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY, CONCERNING THE PEDIGREE OF THE CHUZZLEWIT FAMILY

As no lady or gentleman, with any claims to polite breeding, can possibly sympathize with the Chuzzlewit Family without being first assured of the extreme antiquity of the race, it is a great satisfaction to know that it undoubtedly descended in a direct line from Adam and Eve; and was, in the very earliest times, closely connected with the agricultural interest. If it should ever be urged by grudging and malicious persons, that a Chuzzlewit, in any period of the family history, displayed an overweening amount of family pride, surely the weakness will be considered not only pardonable but laudable, when the immense superiority of the house to the rest of mankind, in respect of this its ancient origin, is taken into account.

It is remarkable that as there was, in the oldest family of which we have any record, a murderer and a vagabond, so we never fail to meet, in the records of all old families, with innumerable repetitions of the same phase of character. Indeed, it may be laid down as a general principle, that the more extended the ancestry, the greater the amount of violence and vagabondism; for in ancient days those two amusements, combining a wholesome excitement with a promising means of repairing shattered fortunes, were at once the ennobling pursuit and the healthful recreation of the Quality of this land.

Consequently, it is a source of inexpressible comfort and happiness to find, that in various periods of our history, the Chuzzlewits were actively connected with divers slaughterous conspiracies and bloody frays. It is further recorded of them, that being clad from head to heel in steel of proof, they did on many occasions lead their leather-jerkined soldiers to the death with invincible courage, and afterwards return home gracefully to their relations and friends.

There can be no doubt that at least one Chuzzlewit came over with William the Conqueror. It does not appear that this illustrious ancestor ‘came over’ that monarch, to employ the vulgar phrase, at any subsequent period; inasmuch as the Family do not seem to have been ever greatly distinguished by the possession of landed estate. And it is well known that for the bestowal of that kind of property upon his favourites, the liberality and gratitude of the Norman were as remarkable as those virtues are usually found to be in great men when they give away what belongs to other people.

Perhaps in this place the history may pause to congratulate itself upon the enormous amount of bravery, wisdom, eloquence, virtue, gentle birth, and true nobility, that appears to have come into England with the Norman Invasion: an amount which the genealogy of every ancient family lends its aid to swell, and which would beyond all question have been found to be just as great, and to the full as prolific in giving birth to long lines of chivalrous descendants, boastful of their origin, even though William the Conqueror had been William the Conquered; a change of circumstances which, it is quite certain, would have made no manner of difference in this respect.

There was unquestionably a Chuzzlewit in the Gunpowder Plot, if indeed the arch-traitor, Fawkes himself, were not a scion of this remarkable stock; as he might easily have been, supposing another Chuzzlewit to have emigrated to Spain in the previous generation, and there intermarried with a Spanish lady, by whom he had issue, one olive-complexioned son. This probable conjecture is strengthened, if not absolutely confirmed, by a fact which cannot fail to be interesting to those who are curious in tracing the progress of hereditary tastes through the lives of their unconscious inheritors. It is a notable circumstance that in these later times, many Chuzzlewits, being unsuccessful in other pursuits, have, without the smallest rational hope of enriching themselves, or any conceivable

reason, set up as coal-merchants; and have, month after month, continued gloomily to watch a small stock of coals, without in any one instance negotiating with a purchaser. The remarkable similarity between this course of proceeding and that adopted by their Great Ancestor beneath the vaults of the Parliament House at Westminster, is too obvious and too full of interest, to stand in need of comment.

It is also clearly proved by the oral traditions of the Family, that there existed, at some one period of its history which is not distinctly stated, a matron of such destructive principles, and so familiarized to the use and composition of inflammatory and combustible engines, that she was called 'The Match Maker;' by which nickname and byword she is recognized in the Family legends to this day. Surely there can be no reasonable doubt that this was the Spanish lady, the mother of Chuzzlewit Fawkes.

But there is one other piece of evidence, bearing immediate reference to their close connection with this memorable event in English History, which must carry conviction, even to a mind (if such a mind there be) remaining unconvinced by these presumptive proofs.

There was, within a few years, in the possession of a highly respectable and in every way credible and unimpeachable member of the Chuzzlewit Family (for his bitterest enemy never dared to hint at his being otherwise than a wealthy man), a dark lantern of undoubted antiquity; rendered still more interesting by being, in shape and pattern, extremely like such as are in use at the present day. Now this gentleman, since deceased, was at all times ready to make oath, and did again and again set forth upon his solemn asseveration, that he had frequently heard his grandmother say, when contemplating this venerable relic, 'Aye, aye! This was carried by my fourth son on the fifth of November, when he was a Guy Fawkes.' These remarkable words wrought (as well they might) a strong impression on his mind, and he was in the habit of repeating them very often. The just interpretation which they bear, and the conclusion to which they lead, are triumphant and irresistible. The old lady, naturally strong-minded, was nevertheless frail and fading; she was notoriously subject to that confusion of ideas, or, to say the least, of speech, to which age and garrulity are liable. The slight, the very slight, confusion apparent in these expressions is manifest, and is ludicrously easy of correction. 'Aye, aye,' quoth she, and it will be observed that no emendation whatever is necessary to be made in these two initiative remarks, 'Aye, aye! This lantern was carried by my forefather' – not fourth son, which is preposterous – 'on the fifth of November. And *he* was Guy Fawkes.' Here we have a remark at once consistent, clear, natural, and in strict accordance with the character of the speaker. Indeed the anecdote is so plainly susceptible of this meaning and no other, that it would be hardly worth recording in its original state, were it not a proof of what may be (and very often is) affected not only in historical prose but in imaginative poetry, by the exercise of a little ingenious labour on the part of a commentator.

It has been said that there is no instance, in modern times, of a Chuzzlewit having been found on terms of intimacy with the Great. But here again the sneering detractors who weave such miserable figments from their malicious brains, are stricken dumb by evidence. For letters are yet in the possession of various branches of the family, from which it distinctly appears, being stated in so many words, that one Diggory Chuzzlewit was in the habit of perpetually dining with Duke Humphrey. So constantly was he a guest at that nobleman's table, indeed; and so unceasingly were His Grace's hospitality and companionship forced, as it were, upon him; that we find him uneasy, and full of constraint and reluctance; writing his friends to the effect that if they fail to do so and so by bearer, he will have no choice but to dine again with Duke Humphrey; and expressing himself in a very marked and extraordinary manner as one surfeited of High Life and Gracious Company.

It has been rumoured, and it is needless to say the rumour originated in the same base quarters, that a certain male Chuzzlewit, whose birth must be admitted to be involved in some obscurity, was of very mean and low descent. How stands the proof? When the son of that individual, to whom the secret of his father's birth was supposed to have been communicated by his father in his lifetime, lay upon his deathbed, this question was put to him in a distinct, solemn, and formal way: 'Toby Chuzzlewit, who was your grandfather?' To which he, with his last breath, no less distinctly, solemnly,

and formally replied: and his words were taken down at the time, and signed by six witnesses, each with his name and address in full: 'The Lord No Zoo.' It may be said – it *has* been said, for human wickedness has no limits – that there is no Lord of that name, and that among the titles which have become extinct, none at all resembling this, in sound even, is to be discovered. But what is the irresistible inference? Rejecting a theory broached by some well-meaning but mistaken persons, that this Mr Toby Chuzzlewit's grandfather, to judge from his name, must surely have been a Mandarin (which is wholly insupportable, for there is no pretence of his grandmother ever having been out of this country, or of any Mandarin having been in it within some years of his father's birth; except those in the tea-shops, which cannot for a moment be regarded as having any bearing on the question, one way or other), rejecting this hypothesis, is it not manifest that Mr Toby Chuzzlewit had either received the name imperfectly from his father, or that he had forgotten it, or that he had mispronounced it? and that even at the recent period in question, the Chuzzlewits were connected by a bend sinister, or kind of heraldic over-the-left, with some unknown noble and illustrious House?

From documentary evidence, yet preserved in the family, the fact is clearly established that in the comparatively modern days of the Diggory Chuzzlewit before mentioned, one of its members had attained to very great wealth and influence. Throughout such fragments of his correspondence as have escaped the ravages of the moths (who, in right of their extensive absorption of the contents of deeds and papers, may be called the general registers of the Insect World), we find him making constant reference to an uncle, in respect of whom he would seem to have entertained great expectations, as he was in the habit of seeking to propitiate his favour by presents of plate, jewels, books, watches, and other valuable articles. Thus, he writes on one occasion to his brother in reference to a gravy-spoon, the brother's property, which he (Diggory) would appear to have borrowed or otherwise possessed himself of: 'Do not be angry, I have parted with it – to my uncle.' On another occasion he expresses himself in a similar manner with regard to a child's mug which had been entrusted to him to get repaired. On another occasion he says, 'I have bestowed upon that irresistible uncle of mine everything I ever possessed.' And that he was in the habit of paying long and constant visits to this gentleman at his mansion, if, indeed, he did not wholly reside there, is manifest from the following sentence: 'With the exception of the suit of clothes I carry about with me, the whole of my wearing apparel is at present at my uncle's.' This gentleman's patronage and influence must have been very extensive, for his nephew writes, 'His interest is too high' – 'It is too much' – 'It is tremendous' – and the like. Still it does not appear (which is strange) to have procured for him any lucrative post at court or elsewhere, or to have conferred upon him any other distinction than that which was necessarily included in the countenance of so great a man, and the being invited by him to certain entertainment's, so splendid and costly in their nature, that he calls them 'Golden Balls.'

It is needless to multiply instances of the high and lofty station, and the vast importance of the Chuzzlewits, at different periods. If it came within the scope of reasonable probability that further proofs were required, they might be heaped upon each other until they formed an Alps of testimony, beneath which the boldest scepticism should be crushed and beaten flat. As a goodly tumulus is already collected, and decently battened up above the Family grave, the present chapter is content to leave it as it is: merely adding, by way of a final spadeful, that many Chuzzlewits, both male and female, are proved to demonstration, on the faith of letters written by their own mothers, to have had chiselled noses, undeniable chins, forms that might have served the sculptor for a model, exquisitely-turned limbs and polished foreheads of so transparent a texture that the blue veins might be seen branching off in various directions, like so many roads on an ethereal map. This fact in itself, though it had been a solitary one, would have utterly settled and clenched the business in hand; for it is well known, on the authority of all the books which treat of such matters, that every one of these phenomena, but especially that of the chiselling, are invariably peculiar to, and only make themselves apparent in, persons of the very best condition.

This history having, to its own perfect satisfaction, (and, consequently, to the full contentment of all its readers,) proved the Chuzzlewits to have had an origin, and to have been at one time or other of an importance which cannot fail to render them highly improving and acceptable acquaintance to all right-minded individuals, may now proceed in earnest with its task. And having shown that they must have had, by reason of their ancient birth, a pretty large share in the foundation and increase of the human family, it will one day become its province to submit, that such of its members as shall be introduced in these pages, have still many counterparts and prototypes in the Great World about us. At present it contents itself with remarking, in a general way, on this head: Firstly, that it may be safely asserted, and yet without implying any direct participation in the Manboddo doctrine touching the probability of the human race having once been monkeys, that men do play very strange and extraordinary tricks. Secondly, and yet without trenching on the Blumenbach theory as to the descendants of Adam having a vast number of qualities which belong more particularly to swine than to any other class of animals in the creation, that some men certainly are remarkable for taking uncommon good care of themselves.

CHAPTER TWO

WHEREIN CERTAIN PERSONS ARE PRESENTED TO THE READER, WITH WHOM HE MAY, IF HE PLEASE, BECOME BETTER ACQUAINTED

It was pretty late in the autumn of the year, when the declining sun struggling through the mist which had obscured it all day, looked brightly down upon a little Wiltshire village, within an easy journey of the fair old town of Salisbury.

Like a sudden flash of memory or spirit kindling up the mind of an old man, it shed a glory upon the scene, in which its departed youth and freshness seemed to live again. The wet grass sparkled in the light; the scanty patches of verdure in the hedges – where a few green twigs yet stood together bravely, resisting to the last the tyranny of nipping winds and early frosts – took heart and brightened up; the stream which had been dull and sullen all day long, broke out into a cheerful smile; the birds began to chirp and twitter on the naked boughs, as though the hopeful creatures half believed that winter had gone by, and spring had come already. The vane upon the tapering spire of the old church glistened from its lofty station in sympathy with the general gladness; and from the ivy-shaded windows such gleams of light shone back upon the glowing sky, that it seemed as if the quiet buildings were the hoarding-place of twenty summers, and all their ruddiness and warmth were stored within.

Even those tokens of the season which emphatically whispered of the coming winter, graced the landscape, and, for the moment, tinged its livelier features with no oppressive air of sadness. The fallen leaves, with which the ground was strewn, gave forth a pleasant fragrance, and subduing all harsh sounds of distant feet and wheels created a repose in gentle unison with the light scattering of seed hither and thither by the distant husbandman, and with the noiseless passage of the plough as it turned up the rich brown earth, and wrought a graceful pattern in the stubbled fields. On the motionless branches of some trees, autumn berries hung like clusters of coral beads, as in those fabled orchards where the fruits were jewels; others stripped of all their garniture, stood, each the centre of its little heap of bright red leaves, watching their slow decay; others again, still wearing theirs, had them all crunched and crackled up, as though they had been burnt; about the stems of some were piled, in ruddy mounds, the apples they had borne that year; while others (hardy evergreens this class) showed somewhat stern and gloomy in their vigour, as charged by nature with the admonition that it is not to her more sensitive and joyous favourites she grants the longest term of life. Still athwart their darker boughs, the sunbeams struck out paths of deeper gold; and the red light, mantling in among their swarthy branches, used them as foils to set its brightness off, and aid the lustre of the dying day.

A moment, and its glory was no more. The sun went down beneath the long dark lines of hill and cloud which piled up in the west an airy city, wall heaped on wall, and battlement on battlement; the light was all withdrawn; the shining church turned cold and dark; the stream forgot to smile; the birds were silent; and the gloom of winter dwelt on everything.

An evening wind uprose too, and the slighter branches cracked and rattled as they moved, in skeleton dances, to its moaning music. The withering leaves no longer quiet, hurried to and fro in search of shelter from its chill pursuit; the labourer unyoked his horses, and with head bent down, trudged briskly home beside them; and from the cottage windows lights began to glance and wink upon the darkening fields.

Then the village forge came out in all its bright importance. The lusty bellows roared Ha ha! to the clear fire, which roared in turn, and bade the shining sparks dance gayly to the merry clinking of the hammers on the anvil. The gleaming iron, in its emulation, sparkled too, and shed its red-hot gems around profusely. The strong smith and his men dealt such strokes upon their work, as made even the melancholy night rejoice, and brought a glow into its dark face as it hovered about the door and windows, peeping curiously in above the shoulders of a dozen loungers. As to this idle company,

there they stood, spellbound by the place, and, casting now and then a glance upon the darkness in their rear, settled their lazy elbows more at ease upon the sill, and leaned a little further in: no more disposed to tear themselves away than if they had been born to cluster round the blazing hearth like so many crickets.

Out upon the angry wind! how from sighing, it began to bluster round the merry forge, banging at the wicket, and grumbling in the chimney, as if it bullied the jolly bellows for doing anything to order. And what an impotent swaggerer it was too, for all its noise; for if it had any influence on that hoarse companion, it was but to make him roar his cheerful song the louder, and by consequence to make the fire burn the brighter, and the sparks to dance more gayly yet; at length, they whizzed so madly round and round, that it was too much for such a surly wind to bear; so off it flew with a howl giving the old sign before the ale-house door such a cuff as it went, that the Blue Dragon was more rampant than usual ever afterwards, and indeed, before Christmas, reared clean out of its crazy frame.

It was small tyranny for a respectable wind to go wreaking its vengeance on such poor creatures as the fallen leaves, but this wind happening to come up with a great heap of them just after venting its humour on the insulted Dragon, did so disperse and scatter them that they fled away, pell-mell, some here, some there, rolling over each other, whirling round and round upon their thin edges, taking frantic flights into the air, and playing all manner of extraordinary gambols in the extremity of their distress. Nor was this enough for its malicious fury; for not content with driving them abroad, it charged small parties of them and hunted them into the wheel wright's saw-pit, and below the planks and timbers in the yard, and, scattering the sawdust in the air, it looked for them underneath, and when it did meet with any, whew! how it drove them on and followed at their heels!

The scared leaves only flew the faster for all this, and a giddy chase it was; for they got into unfrequented places, where there was no outlet, and where their pursuer kept them eddying round and round at his pleasure; and they crept under the eaves of houses, and clung tightly to the sides of hay-ricks, like bats; and tore in at open chamber windows, and cowered close to hedges; and, in short, went anywhere for safety. But the oddest feat they achieved was, to take advantage of the sudden opening of Mr Pecksniff's front-door, to dash wildly into his passage; whither the wind following close upon them, and finding the back-door open, incontinently blew out the lighted candle held by Miss Pecksniff, and slammed the front-door against Mr Pecksniff who was at that moment entering, with such violence, that in the twinkling of an eye he lay on his back at the bottom of the steps. Being by this time weary of such trifling performances, the boisterous rover hurried away rejoicing, roaring over moor and meadow, hill and flat, until it got out to sea, where it met with other winds similarly disposed, and made a night of it.

In the meantime Mr Pecksniff, having received from a sharp angle in the bottom step but one, that sort of knock on the head which lights up, for the patient's entertainment, an imaginary general illumination of very bright short-sixes, lay placidly staring at his own street door. And it would seem to have been more suggestive in its aspect than street doors usually are; for he continued to lie there, rather a lengthy and unreasonable time, without so much as wondering whether he was hurt or no; neither, when Miss Pecksniff inquired through the key-hole in a shrill voice, which might have belonged to a wind in its teens, 'Who's there' did he make any reply; nor, when Miss Pecksniff opened the door again, and shading the candle with her hand, peered out, and looked provokingly round him, and about him, and over him, and everywhere but at him, did he offer any remark, or indicate in any manner the least hint of a desire to be picked up.

'I see you,' cried Miss Pecksniff, to the ideal inflicter of a runaway knock. 'You'll catch it, sir!'

Still Mr Pecksniff, perhaps from having caught it already, said nothing.

'You're round the corner now,' cried Miss Pecksniff. She said it at a venture, but there was appropriate matter in it too; for Mr Pecksniff, being in the act of extinguishing the candles before mentioned pretty rapidly, and of reducing the number of brass knobs on his street door from four or five hundred (which had previously been juggling of their own accord before his eyes in a very

novel manner) to a dozen or so, might in one sense have been said to be coming round the corner, and just turning it.

With a sharply delivered warning relative to the cage and the constable, and the stocks and the gallows, Miss Pecksniff was about to close the door again, when Mr Pecksniff (being still at the bottom of the steps) raised himself on one elbow, and sneezed.

'That voice!' cried Miss Pecksniff. 'My parent!'

At this exclamation, another Miss Pecksniff bounced out of the parlour; and the two Miss Pecksniffs, with many incoherent expressions, dragged Mr Pecksniff into an upright posture.

'Pa!' they cried in concert. 'Pa! Speak, Pa! Do not look so wild my dearest Pa!'

But as a gentleman's looks, in such a case of all others, are by no means under his own control, Mr Pecksniff continued to keep his mouth and his eyes very wide open, and to drop his lower jaw, somewhat after the manner of a toy nut-cracker; and as his hat had fallen off, and his face was pale, and his hair erect, and his coat muddy, the spectacle he presented was so very doleful, that neither of the Miss Pecksniffs could repress an involuntary screech.

'That'll do,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'I'm better.'

'He's come to himself!' cried the youngest Miss Pecksniff.

'He speaks again!' exclaimed the eldest.

With these joyful words they kissed Mr Pecksniff on either cheek; and bore him into the house. Presently, the youngest Miss Pecksniff ran out again to pick up his hat, his brown paper parcel, his umbrella, his gloves, and other small articles; and that done, and the door closed, both young ladies applied themselves to tending Mr Pecksniff's wounds in the back parlour.

They were not very serious in their nature; being limited to abrasions on what the eldest Miss Pecksniff called 'the knobby parts' of her parent's anatomy, such as his knees and elbows, and to the development of an entirely new organ, unknown to phrenologists, on the back of his head. These injuries having been comforted externally, with patches of pickled brown paper, and Mr Pecksniff having been comforted internally, with some stiff brandy-and-water, the eldest Miss Pecksniff sat down to make the tea, which was all ready. In the meantime the youngest Miss Pecksniff brought from the kitchen a smoking dish of ham and eggs, and, setting the same before her father, took up her station on a low stool at his feet; thereby bringing her eyes on a level with the teaboard.

It must not be inferred from this position of humility, that the youngest Miss Pecksniff was so young as to be, as one may say, forced to sit upon a stool, by reason of the shortness of her legs. Miss Pecksniff sat upon a stool because of her simplicity and innocence, which were very great, very great. Miss Pecksniff sat upon a stool because she was all girlishness, and playfulness, and wildness, and kittenish buoyancy. She was the most arch and at the same time the most artless creature, was the youngest Miss Pecksniff, that you can possibly imagine. It was her great charm. She was too fresh and guileless, and too full of child-like vivacity, was the youngest Miss Pecksniff, to wear combs in her hair, or to turn it up, or to frizzle it, or braid it. She wore it in a crop, a loosely flowing crop, which had so many rows of curls in it, that the top row was only one curl. Moderately buxom was her shape, and quite womanly too; but sometimes – yes, sometimes – she even wore a pinafore; and how charming *that* was! Oh! she was indeed 'a gushing thing' (as a young gentleman had observed in verse, in the Poet's Corner of a provincial newspaper), was the youngest Miss Pecksniff!

Mr Pecksniff was a moral man – a grave man, a man of noble sentiments and speech – and he had had her christened Mercy. Mercy! oh, what a charming name for such a pure-souled Being as the youngest Miss Pecksniff! Her sister's name was Charity. There was a good thing! Mercy and Charity! And Charity, with her fine strong sense and her mild, yet not reproachful gravity, was so well named, and did so well set off and illustrate her sister! What a pleasant sight was that the contrast they presented; to see each loved and loving one sympathizing with, and devoted to, and leaning on, and yet correcting and counter-checking, and, as it were, antidoting, the other! To behold each damsel in her very admiration of her sister, setting up in business for herself on an entirely different principle,

and announcing no connection with over-the-way, and if the quality of goods at that establishment don't please you, you are respectfully invited to favour *me* with a call! And the crowning circumstance of the whole delightful catalogue was, that both the fair creatures were so utterly unconscious of all this! They had no idea of it. They no more thought or dreamed of it than Mr Pecksniff did. Nature played them off against each other; *they* had no hand in it, the two Miss Pecksniffs.

It has been remarked that Mr Pecksniff was a moral man. So he was. Perhaps there never was a more moral man than Mr Pecksniff, especially in his conversation and correspondence. It was once said of him by a homely admirer, that he had a Fortunatus's purse of good sentiments in his inside. In this particular he was like the girl in the fairy tale, except that if they were not actual diamonds which fell from his lips, they were the very brightest paste, and shone prodigiously. He was a most exemplary man; fuller of virtuous precept than a copy book. Some people likened him to a direction-post, which is always telling the way to a place, and never goes there; but these were his enemies, the shadows cast by his brightness; that was all. His very throat was moral. You saw a good deal of it. You looked over a very low fence of white cravat (whereof no man had ever beheld the tie for he fastened it behind), and there it lay, a valley between two jutting heights of collar, serene and whiskerless before you. It seemed to say, on the part of Mr Pecksniff, 'There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen, all is peace, a holy calm pervades me.' So did his hair, just grizzled with an iron-grey which was all brushed off his forehead, and stood bolt upright, or slightly drooped in kindred action with his heavy eyelids. So did his person, which was sleek though free from corpulency. So did his manner, which was soft and oily. In a word, even his plain black suit, and state of widower and dangling double eye-glass, all tended to the same purpose, and cried aloud, 'Behold the moral Pecksniff!'

The brazen plate upon the door (which being Mr Pecksniff's, could not lie) bore this inscription, 'PECKSNIFF, ARCHITECT,' to which Mr Pecksniff, on his cards of business, added, AND LAND SURVEYOR.' In one sense, and only one, he may be said to have been a Land Surveyor on a pretty large scale, as an extensive prospect lay stretched out before the windows of his house. Of his architectural doings, nothing was clearly known, except that he had never designed or built anything; but it was generally understood that his knowledge of the science was almost awful in its profundity.

Mr Pecksniff's professional engagements, indeed, were almost, if not entirely, confined to the reception of pupils; for the collection of rents, with which pursuit he occasionally varied and relieved his graver toils, can hardly be said to be a strictly architectural employment. His genius lay in ensnaring parents and guardians, and pocketing premiums. A young gentleman's premium being paid, and the young gentleman come to Mr Pecksniff's house, Mr Pecksniff borrowed his case of mathematical instruments (if silver-mounted or otherwise valuable); entreated him, from that moment, to consider himself one of the family; complimented him highly on his parents or guardians, as the case might be; and turned him loose in a spacious room on the two-pair front; where, in the company of certain drawing-boards, parallel rulers, very stiff-legged compasses, and two, or perhaps three, other young gentlemen, he improved himself, for three or five years, according to his articles, in making elevations of Salisbury Cathedral from every possible point of sight; and in constructing in the air a vast quantity of Castles, Houses of Parliament, and other Public Buildings. Perhaps in no place in the world were so many gorgeous edifices of this class erected as under Mr Pecksniff's auspices; and if but one-twentieth part of the churches which were built in that front room, with one or other of the Miss Pecksniffs at the altar in the act of marrying the architect, could only be made available by the parliamentary commissioners, no more churches would be wanted for at least five centuries.

'Even the worldly goods of which we have just disposed,' said Mr Pecksniff, glancing round the table when he had finished, 'even cream, sugar, tea, toast, ham – '

'And eggs,' suggested Charity in a low voice.

'And eggs,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'even they have their moral. See how they come and go! Every pleasure is transitory. We can't even eat, long. If we indulge in harmless fluids, we get the dropsy; if in exciting liquids, we get drunk. What a soothing reflection is that!'

'Don't say *we* get drunk, Pa,' urged the eldest Miss Pecksniff.

'When I say we, my dear,' returned her father, 'I mean mankind in general; the human race, considered as a body, and not as individuals. There is nothing personal in morality, my love. Even such a thing as this,' said Mr Pecksniff, laying the fore-finger of his left hand upon the brown paper patch on the top of his head, 'slight casual baldness though it be, reminds us that we are but' – he was going to say 'worms,' but recollecting that worms were not remarkable for heads of hair, he substituted 'flesh and blood.'

'Which,' cried Mr Pecksniff after a pause, during which he seemed to have been casting about for a new moral, and not quite successfully, 'which is also very soothing. Mercy, my dear, stir the fire and throw up the cinders.'

The young lady obeyed, and having done so, resumed her stool, reposed one arm upon her father's knee, and laid her blooming cheek upon it. Miss Charity drew her chair nearer the fire, as one prepared for conversation, and looked towards her father.

'Yes,' said Mr Pecksniff, after a short pause, during which he had been silently smiling, and shaking his head at the fire – 'I have again been fortunate in the attainment of my object. A new inmate will very shortly come among us.'

'A youth, papa?' asked Charity.

'Ye-es, a youth,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'He will avail himself of the eligible opportunity which now offers, for uniting the advantages of the best practical architectural education with the comforts of a home, and the constant association with some who (however humble their sphere, and limited their capacity) are not unmindful of their moral responsibilities.'

'Oh Pa!' cried Mercy, holding up her finger archly. 'See advertisement!'

'Playful – playful warbler,' said Mr Pecksniff. It may be observed in connection with his calling his daughter a 'warbler,' that she was not at all vocal, but that Mr Pecksniff was in the frequent habit of using any word that occurred to him as having a good sound, and rounding a sentence well without much care for its meaning. And he did this so boldly, and in such an imposing manner, that he would sometimes stagger the wisest people with his eloquence, and make them gasp again.

His enemies asserted, by the way, that a strong trustfulness in sounds and forms was the master-key to Mr Pecksniff's character.

'Is he handsome, Pa?' inquired the younger daughter.

'Silly Merry!' said the eldest: Merry being fond for Mercy. 'What is the premium, Pa? tell us that.'

'Oh, good gracious, Cherry!' cried Miss Mercy, holding up her hands with the most winning giggle in the world, 'what a mercenary girl you are! oh you naughty, thoughtful, prudent thing!'

It was perfectly charming, and worthy of the Pastoral age, to see how the two Miss Pecksniffs slapped each other after this, and then subsided into an embrace expressive of their different dispositions.

'He is well looking,' said Mr Pecksniff, slowly and distinctly; 'well looking enough. I do not positively expect any immediate premium with him.'

Notwithstanding their different natures, both Charity and Mercy concurred in opening their eyes uncommonly wide at this announcement, and in looking for the moment as blank as if their thoughts had actually had a direct bearing on the main chance.

'But what of that!' said Mr Pecksniff, still smiling at the fire. 'There is disinterestedness in the world, I hope? We are not all arrayed in two opposite ranks; the *of*fensive and the *de*fensive. Some few there are who walk between; who help the needy as they go; and take no part with either side. Umph!'

There was something in these morsels of philanthropy which reassured the sisters. They exchanged glances, and brightened very much.

'Oh! let us not be for ever calculating, devising, and plotting for the future,' said Mr Pecksniff, smiling more and more, and looking at the fire as a man might, who was cracking a joke with it: 'I

am weary of such arts. If our inclinations are but good and open-hearted, let us gratify them boldly, though they bring upon us Loss instead of Profit. Eh, Charity?'

Glancing towards his daughters for the first time since he had begun these reflections, and seeing that they both smiled, Mr Pecksniff eyed them for an instant so jocosely (though still with a kind of saintly waggishness) that the younger one was moved to sit upon his knee forthwith, put her fair arms round his neck, and kiss him twenty times. During the whole of this affectionate display she laughed to a most immoderate extent: in which hilarious indulgence even the prudent Cherry joined.

'Tut, tut,' said Mr Pecksniff, pushing his latest-born away and running his fingers through his hair, as he resumed his tranquil face. 'What folly is this! Let us take heed how we laugh without reason lest we cry with it. What is the domestic news since yesterday? John Westlock is gone, I hope?'

'Indeed, no,' said Charity.

'And why not?' returned her father. 'His term expired yesterday. And his box was packed, I know; for I saw it, in the morning, standing in the hall.'

'He slept last night at the Dragon,' returned the young lady, 'and had Mr Pinch to dine with him. They spent the evening together, and Mr Pinch was not home till very late.'

'And when I saw him on the stairs this morning, Pa,' said Mercy with her usual sprightliness, 'he looked, oh goodness, *such* a monster! with his face all manner of colours, and his eyes as dull as if they had been boiled, and his head aching dreadfully, I am sure from the look of it, and his clothes smelling, oh it's impossible to say how strong, oh' – here the young lady shuddered – 'of smoke and punch.'

'Now I think,' said Mr Pecksniff with his accustomed gentleness, though still with the air of one who suffered under injury without complaint, 'I think Mr Pinch might have done better than choose for his companion one who, at the close of a long intercourse, had endeavoured, as he knew, to wound my feelings. I am not quite sure that this was delicate in Mr Pinch. I am not quite sure that this was kind in Mr Pinch. I will go further and say, I am not quite sure that this was even ordinarily grateful in Mr Pinch.'

'But what can anyone expect from Mr Pinch!' cried Charity, with as strong and scornful an emphasis on the name as if it would have given her unspeakable pleasure to express it, in an acted charade, on the calf of that gentleman's leg.

'Aye, aye,' returned her father, raising his hand mildly: 'it is very well to say what can we expect from Mr Pinch, but Mr Pinch is a fellow-creature, my dear; Mr Pinch is an item in the vast total of humanity, my love; and we have a right, it is our duty, to expect in Mr Pinch some development of those better qualities, the possession of which in our own persons inspires our humble self-respect. No,' continued Mr Pecksniff. 'No! Heaven forbid that I should say, nothing can be expected from Mr Pinch; or that I should say, nothing can be expected from any man alive (even the most degraded, which Mr Pinch is not, no, really); but Mr Pinch has disappointed me; he has hurt me; I think a little the worse of him on this account, but not if human nature. Oh, no, no!'

'Hark!' said Miss Charity, holding up her finger, as a gentle rap was heard at the street door. 'There is the creature! Now mark my words, he has come back with John Westlock for his box, and is going to help him to take it to the mail. Only mark my words, if that isn't his intention!'

Even as she spoke, the box appeared to be in progress of conveyance from the house, but after a brief murmuring of question and answer, it was put down again, and somebody knocked at the parlour door.

'Come in!' cried Mr Pecksniff – not severely; only virtuously. 'Come in!'

An ungainly, awkward-looking man, extremely short-sighted, and prematurely bald, availed himself of this permission; and seeing that Mr Pecksniff sat with his back towards him, gazing at the fire, stood hesitating, with the door in his hand. He was far from handsome certainly; and was drest in a snuff-coloured suit, of an uncouth make at the best, which, being shrunk with long wear, was twisted and tortured into all kinds of odd shapes; but notwithstanding his attire, and his clumsy figure,

which a great stoop in his shoulders, and a ludicrous habit he had of thrusting his head forward, by no means redeemed, one would not have been disposed (unless Mr Pecksniff said so) to consider him a bad fellow by any means. He was perhaps about thirty, but he might have been almost any age between sixteen and sixty; being one of those strange creatures who never decline into an ancient appearance, but look their oldest when they are very young, and get it over at once.

Keeping his hand upon the lock of the door, he glanced from Mr Pecksniff to Mercy, from Mercy to Charity, and from Charity to Mr Pecksniff again, several times; but the young ladies being as intent upon the fire as their father was, and neither of the three taking any notice of him, he was fain to say, at last,

'Oh! I beg your pardon, Mr Pecksniff: I beg your pardon for intruding; but – '

'No intrusion, Mr Pinch,' said that gentleman very sweetly, but without looking round. 'Pray be seated, Mr Pinch. Have the goodness to shut the door, Mr Pinch, if you please.'

'Certainly, sir,' said Pinch; not doing so, however, but holding it rather wider open than before, and beckoning nervously to somebody without: 'Mr Westlock, sir, hearing that you were come home – '

'Mr Pinch, Mr Pinch!' said Pecksniff, wheeling his chair about, and looking at him with an aspect of the deepest melancholy, 'I did not expect this from you. I have not deserved this from you!'

'No, but upon my word, sir – ' urged Pinch.

'The less you say, Mr Pinch,' interposed the other, 'the better. I utter no complaint. Make no defence.'

'No, but do have the goodness, sir,' cried Pinch, with great earnestness, 'if you please. Mr Westlock, sir, going away for good and all, wishes to leave none but friends behind him. Mr Westlock and you, sir, had a little difference the other day; you have had many little differences.'

'Little differences!' cried Charity.

'Little differences!' echoed Mercy.

'My loves!' said Mr Pecksniff, with the same serene upraising of his hand; 'My dears!' After a solemn pause he meekly bowed to Mr Pinch, as who should say, 'Proceed;' but Mr Pinch was so very much at a loss how to resume, and looked so helplessly at the two Miss Pecksniffs, that the conversation would most probably have terminated there, if a good-looking youth, newly arrived at man's estate, had not stepped forward from the doorway and taken up the thread of the discourse.

'Come, Mr Pecksniff,' he said, with a smile, 'don't let there be any ill-blood between us, pray. I am sorry we have ever differed, and extremely sorry I have ever given you offence. Bear me no ill-will at parting, sir.'

'I bear,' answered Mr Pecksniff, mildly, 'no ill-will to any man on earth.'

'I told you he didn't,' said Pinch, in an undertone; 'I knew he didn't! He always says he don't.'

'Then you will shake hands, sir?' cried Westlock, advancing a step or two, and bespeaking Mr Pinch's close attention by a glance.

'Umph!' said Mr Pecksniff, in his most winning tone.

'You will shake hands, sir.'

'No, John,' said Mr Pecksniff, with a calmness quite ethereal; 'no, I will not shake hands, John. I have forgiven you. I had already forgiven you, even before you ceased to reproach and taunt me. I have embraced you in the spirit, John, which is better than shaking hands.'

'Pinch,' said the youth, turning towards him, with a hearty disgust of his late master, 'what did I tell you?'

Poor Pinch looked down uneasily at Mr Pecksniff, whose eye was fixed upon him as it had been from the first; and looking up at the ceiling again, made no reply.

'As to your forgiveness, Mr Pecksniff,' said the youth, 'I'll not have it upon such terms. I won't be forgiven.'

'Won't you, John?' retorted Mr Pecksniff, with a smile. 'You must. You can't help it. Forgiveness is a high quality; an exalted virtue; far above *your* control or influence, John. I *will* forgive you. You cannot move me to remember any wrong you have ever done me, John.'

'Wrong!' cried the other, with all the heat and impetuosity of his age. 'Here's a pretty fellow! Wrong! Wrong I have done him! He'll not even remember the five hundred pounds he had with me under false pretences; or the seventy pounds a year for board and lodging that would have been dear at seventeen! Here's a martyr!'

'Money, John,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'is the root of all evil. I grieve to see that it is already bearing evil fruit in you. But I will not remember its existence. I will not even remember the conduct of that misguided person' – and here, although he spoke like one at peace with all the world, he used an emphasis that plainly said "I have my eye upon the rascal now" – 'that misguided person who has brought you here to-night, seeking to disturb (it is a happiness to say, in vain) the heart's repose and peace of one who would have shed his dearest blood to serve him.'

The voice of Mr Pecksniff trembled as he spoke, and sobs were heard from his daughters. Sounds floated on the air, moreover, as if two spirit voices had exclaimed: one, 'Beast!' the other, 'Savage!'

'Forgiveness,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'entire and pure forgiveness is not incompatible with a wounded heart; perchance when the heart is wounded, it becomes a greater virtue. With my breast still wrung and grieved to its inmost core by the ingratitude of that person, I am proud and glad to say that I forgive him. Nay! I beg,' cried Mr Pecksniff, raising his voice, as Pinch appeared about to speak, 'I beg that individual not to offer a remark; he will truly oblige me by not uttering one word, just now. I am not sure that I am equal to the trial. In a very short space of time, I shall have sufficient fortitude, I trust to converse with him as if these events had never happened. But not,' said Mr Pecksniff, turning round again towards the fire, and waving his hand in the direction of the door, 'not now.'

'Bah!' cried John Westlock, with the utmost disgust and disdain the monosyllable is capable of expressing. 'Ladies, good evening. Come, Pinch, it's not worth thinking of. I was right and you were wrong. That's small matter; you'll be wiser another time.'

So saying, he clapped that dejected companion on the shoulder, turned upon his heel, and walked out into the passage, whither poor Mr Pinch, after lingering irresolutely in the parlour for a few seconds, expressing in his countenance the deepest mental misery and gloom followed him. Then they took up the box between them, and sallied out to meet the mail.

That fleet conveyance passed, every night, the corner of a lane at some distance; towards which point they bent their steps. For some minutes they walked along in silence, until at length young Westlock burst into a loud laugh, and at intervals into another, and another. Still there was no response from his companion.

'I'll tell you what, Pinch!' he said abruptly, after another lengthened silence – 'You haven't half enough of the devil in you. Half enough! You haven't any.'

'Well!' said Pinch with a sigh, 'I don't know, I'm sure. It's compliment to say so. If I haven't, I suppose, I'm all the better for it.'

'All the better!' repeated his companion tartly: 'All the worse, you mean to say.'

'And yet,' said Pinch, pursuing his own thoughts and not this last remark on the part of his friend, 'I must have a good deal of what you call the devil in me, too, or how could I make Pecksniff so uncomfortable? I wouldn't have occasioned him so much distress – don't laugh, please – for a mine of money; and Heaven knows I could find good use for it too, John. How grieved he was!'

'*He* grieved!' returned the other.

'Why didn't you observe that the tears were almost starting out of his eyes!' cried Pinch. 'Bless my soul, John, is it nothing to see a man moved to that extent and know one's self to be the cause! And did you hear him say that he could have shed his blood for me?'

'Do you *want* any blood shed for you?' returned his friend, with considerable irritation. 'Does he shed anything for you that you *do* want? Does he shed employment for you, instruction for you, pocket money for you? Does he shed even legs of mutton for you in any decent proportion to potatoes and garden stuff?'

'I am afraid,' said Pinch, sighing again, 'that I am a great eater; I can't disguise from myself that I'm a great eater. Now, you know that, John.'

'You a great eater!' retorted his companion, with no less indignation than before. 'How do you know you are?'

There appeared to be forcible matter in this inquiry, for Mr Pinch only repeated in an undertone that he had a strong misgiving on the subject, and that he greatly feared he was.

'Besides, whether I am or no,' he added, 'that has little or nothing to do with his thinking me ungrateful. John, there is scarcely a sin in the world that is in my eyes such a crying one as ingratitude; and when he taxes me with that, and believes me to be guilty of it, he makes me miserable and wretched.'

'Do you think he don't know that?' returned the other scornfully. 'But come, Pinch, before I say anything more to you, just run over the reasons you have for being grateful to him at all, will you? Change hands first, for the box is heavy. That'll do. Now, go on.'

'In the first place,' said Pinch, 'he took me as his pupil for much less than he asked.'

'Well,' rejoined his friend, perfectly unmoved by this instance of generosity. 'What in the second place?'

'What in the second place?' cried Pinch, in a sort of desperation, 'why, everything in the second place. My poor old grandmother died happy to think that she had put me with such an excellent man. I have grown up in his house, I am in his confidence, I am his assistant, he allows me a salary; when his business improves, my prospects are to improve too. All this, and a great deal more, is in the second place. And in the very prologue and preface to the first place, John, you must consider this, which nobody knows better than I: that I was born for much plainer and poorer things, that I am not a good hand for his kind of business, and have no talent for it, or indeed for anything else but odds and ends that are of no use or service to anybody.'

He said this with so much earnestness, and in a tone so full of feeling, that his companion instinctively changed his manner as he sat down on the box (they had by this time reached the finger-post at the end of the lane); motioned him to sit down beside him; and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

'I believe you are one of the best fellows in the world,' he said, 'Tom Pinch.'

'Not at all,' rejoined Tom. 'If you only knew Pecksniff as well as I do, you might say it of him, indeed, and say it truly.'

'I'll say anything of him, you like,' returned the other, 'and not another word to his disparagement.'

'It's for my sake, then; not his, I am afraid,' said Pinch, shaking his head gravely.

'For whose you please, Tom, so that it does please you. Oh! He's a famous fellow! *he* never scraped and clawed into his pouch all your poor grandmother's hard savings – she was a housekeeper, wasn't she, Tom?'

'Yes,' said Mr Pinch, nursing one of his large knees, and nodding his head; 'a gentleman's housekeeper.'

'*He* never scraped and clawed into his pouch all her hard savings; dazzling her with prospects of your happiness and advancement, which he knew (and no man better) never would be realised! *He* never speculated and traded on her pride in you, and her having educated you, and on her desire that you at least should live to be a gentleman. Not he, Tom!'

'No,' said Tom, looking into his friend's face, as if he were a little doubtful of his meaning. 'Of course not.'

'So I say,' returned the youth, 'of course he never did. *He* didn't take less than he had asked, because that less was all she had, and more than he expected; not he, Tom! He doesn't keep you as his assistant because you are of any use to him; because your wonderful faith in his pretensions is of inestimable service in all his mean disputes; because your honesty reflects honesty on him; because your wandering about this little place all your spare hours, reading in ancient books and foreign tongues, gets noised abroad, even as far as Salisbury, making of him, Pecksniff the master, a man of learning and of vast importance. *He* gets no credit from you, Tom, not he.'

'Why, of course he don't,' said Pinch, gazing at his friend with a more troubled aspect than before. 'Pecksniff get credit from me! Well!'

'Don't I say that it's ridiculous,' rejoined the other, 'even to think of such a thing?'

'Why, it's madness,' said Tom.

'Madness!' returned young Westlock. 'Certainly it's madness. Who but a madman would suppose he cares to hear it said on Sundays, that the volunteer who plays the organ in the church, and practises on summer evenings in the dark, is Mr Pecksniff's young man, eh, Tom? Who but a madman would suppose it is the game of such a man as he, to have his name in everybody's mouth, connected with the thousand useless odds and ends you do (and which, of course, he taught you), eh, Tom? Who but a madman would suppose you advertised him hereabouts, much cheaper and much better than a chalker on the walls could, eh, Tom? As well might one suppose that he doesn't on all occasions pour out his whole heart and soul to you; that he doesn't make you a very liberal and indeed rather an extravagant allowance; or, to be more wild and monstrous still, if that be possible, as well might one suppose,' and here, at every word, he struck him lightly on the breast, 'that Pecksniff traded in your nature, and that your nature was to be timid and distrustful of yourself, and trustful of all other men, but most of all, of him who least deserves it. There would be madness, Tom!'

Mr Pinch had listened to all this with looks of bewilderment, which seemed to be in part occasioned by the matter of his companion's speech, and in part by his rapid and vehement manner. Now that he had come to a close, he drew a very long breath; and gazing wistfully in his face as if he were unable to settle in his own mind what expression it wore, and were desirous to draw from it as good a clue to his real meaning as it was possible to obtain in the dark, was about to answer, when the sound of the mail guard's horn came cheerily upon their ears, putting an immediate end to the conference; greatly as it seemed to the satisfaction of the younger man, who jumped up briskly, and gave his hand to his companion.

'Both hands, Tom. I shall write to you from London, mind!'

'Yes,' said Pinch. 'Yes. Do, please. Good-bye. Good-bye. I can hardly believe you're going. It seems, now, but yesterday that you came. Good-bye! my dear old fellow!'

John Westlock returned his parting words with no less heartiness of manner, and sprung up to his seat upon the roof. Off went the mail at a canter down the dark road; the lamps gleaming brightly, and the horn awakening all the echoes, far and wide.

'Go your ways,' said Pinch, apostrophizing the coach; 'I can hardly persuade myself but you're alive, and are some great monster who visits this place at certain intervals, to bear my friends away into the world. You're more exulting and rampant than usual tonight, I think; and you may well crow over your prize; for he is a fine lad, an ingenuous lad, and has but one fault that I know of; he don't mean it, but he is most cruelly unjust to Pecksniff!'

CHAPTER THREE

IN WHICH CERTAIN OTHER PERSONS ARE INTRODUCED; ON THE SAME TERMS AS IN THE LAST CHAPTER

Mention has been already made more than once, of a certain Dragon who swung and creaked complainingly before the village alehouse door. A faded, and an ancient dragon he was; and many a wintry storm of rain, snow, sleet, and hail, had changed his colour from a gaudy blue to a faint lack-lustre shade of grey. But there he hung; rearing, in a state of monstrous imbecility, on his hind legs; waxing, with every month that passed, so much more dim and shapeless, that as you gazed at him on one side of the sign-board it seemed as if he must be gradually melting through it, and coming out upon the other.

He was a courteous and considerate dragon, too; or had been in his distincter days; for in the midst of his rampant feebleness, he kept one of his forepaws near his nose, as though he would say, 'Don't mind me – it's only my fun;' while he held out the other in polite and hospitable entreaty. Indeed it must be conceded to the whole brood of dragons of modern times, that they have made a great advance in civilisation and refinement. They no longer demand a beautiful virgin for breakfast every morning, with as much regularity as any tame single gentleman expects his hot roll, but rest content with the society of idle bachelors and roving married men; and they are now remarkable rather for holding aloof from the softer sex and discouraging their visits (especially on Saturday nights), than for rudely insisting on their company without any reference to their inclinations, as they are known to have done in days of yore.

Nor is this tribute to the reclaimed animals in question so wide a digression into the realms of Natural History as it may, at first sight, appear to be; for the present business of these pages in with the dragon who had his retreat in Mr Pecksniff's neighbourhood, and that courteous animal being already on the carpet, there is nothing in the way of its immediate transaction.

For many years, then, he had swung and creaked, and flapped himself about, before the two windows of the best bedroom of that house of entertainment to which he lent his name; but never in all his swinging, creaking, and flapping, had there been such a stir within its dingy precincts, as on the evening next after that upon which the incidents, detailed in the last chapter occurred; when there was such a hurrying up and down stairs of feet, such a glancing of lights, such a whispering of voices, such a smoking and sputtering of wood newly lighted in a damp chimney, such an airing of linen, such a scorching smell of hot warming-pans, such a domestic bustle and to-do, in short, as never dragon, griffin, unicorn, or other animal of that species presided over, since they first began to interest themselves in household affairs.

An old gentleman and a young lady, travelling, unattended, in a rusty old chariot with post-horses; coming nobody knew whence and going nobody knew whither; had turned out of the high road, and driven unexpectedly to the Blue Dragon; and here was the old gentleman, who had taken this step by reason of his sudden illness in the carriage, suffering the most horrible cramps and spasms, yet protesting and vowing in the very midst of his pain, that he wouldn't have a doctor sent for, and wouldn't take any remedies but those which the young lady administered from a small medicine-chest, and wouldn't, in a word, do anything but terrify the landlady out of her five wits, and obstinately refuse compliance with every suggestion that was made to him.

Of all the five hundred proposals for his relief which the good woman poured out in less than half an hour, he would entertain but one. That was that he should go to bed. And it was in the preparation of his bed and the arrangement of his chamber, that all the stir was made in the room behind the Dragon.

He was, beyond all question, very ill, and suffered exceedingly; not the less, perhaps, because he was a strong and vigorous old man, with a will of iron, and a voice of brass. But neither the apprehensions which he plainly entertained, at times, for his life, nor the great pain he underwent, influenced his resolution in the least degree. He would have no person sent for. The worse he grew, the more rigid and inflexible he became in his determination. If they sent for any person to attend him, man, woman, or child, he would leave the house directly (so he told them), though he quitted it on foot, and died upon the threshold of the door.

Now, there being no medical practitioner actually resident in the village, but a poor apothecary who was also a grocer and general dealer, the landlady had, upon her own responsibility, sent for him, in the very first burst and outset of the disaster. Of course it followed, as a necessary result of his being wanted, that he was not at home. He had gone some miles away, and was not expected home until late at night; so the landlady, being by this time pretty well beside herself, dispatched the same messenger in all haste for Mr Pecksniff, as a learned man who could bear a deal of responsibility, and a moral man who could administer a world of comfort to a troubled mind. That her guest had need of some efficient services under the latter head was obvious enough from the restless expressions, importing, however, rather a worldly than a spiritual anxiety, to which he gave frequent utterance.

From this last-mentioned secret errand, the messenger returned with no better news than from the first; Mr Pecksniff was not at home. However, they got the patient into bed without him; and in the course of two hours, he gradually became so far better that there were much longer intervals than at first between his terms of suffering. By degrees, he ceased to suffer at all; though his exhaustion was occasionally so great that it suggested hardly less alarm than his actual endurance had done.

It was in one of his intervals of repose, when, looking round with great caution, and reaching uneasily out of his nest of pillows, he endeavoured, with a strange air of secrecy and distrust, to make use of the writing materials which he had ordered to be placed on a table beside him, that the young lady and the mistress of the Blue Dragon found themselves sitting side by side before the fire in the sick chamber.

The mistress of the Blue Dragon was in outward appearance just what a landlady should be: broad, buxom, comfortable, and good looking, with a face of clear red and white, which, by its jovial aspect, at once bore testimony to her hearty participation in the good things of the larder and cellar, and to their thriving and healthful influences. She was a widow, but years ago had passed through her state of weeds, and burst into flower again; and in full bloom she had continued ever since; and in full bloom she was now; with roses on her ample skirts, and roses on her bodice, roses in her cap, roses in her cheeks, – aye, and roses, worth the gathering too, on her lips, for that matter. She had still a bright black eye, and jet black hair; was comely, dimpled, plump, and tight as a gooseberry; and though she was not exactly what the world calls young, you may make an affidavit, on trust, before any mayor or magistrate in Christendom, that there are a great many young ladies in the world (blessings on them one and all!) whom you wouldn't like half as well, or admire half as much, as the beaming hostess of the Blue Dragon.

As this fair matron sat beside the fire, she glanced occasionally with all the pride of ownership, about the room; which was a large apartment, such as one may see in country places, with a low roof and a sunken flooring, all downhill from the door, and a descent of two steps on the inside so exquisitely unexpected, that strangers, despite the most elaborate cautioning, usually dived in head first, as into a plunging-bath. It was none of your frivolous and preposterously bright bedrooms, where nobody can close an eye with any kind of propriety or decent regard to the association of ideas; but it was a good, dull, leaden, drowsy place, where every article of furniture reminded you that you came there to sleep, and that you were expected to go to sleep. There was no wakeful reflection of the fire there, as in your modern chambers, which upon the darkest nights have a watchful consciousness of French polish; the old Spanish mahogany winked at it now and then, as a dozing cat or dog might, nothing more. The very size and shape, and hopeless immovability of the bedstead, and wardrobe,

and in a minor degree of even the chairs and tables, provoked sleep; they were plainly apoplectic and disposed to snore. There were no staring portraits to remonstrate with you for being lazy; no round-eyed birds upon the curtains, disgustingly wide awake, and insufferably prying. The thick neutral hangings, and the dark blinds, and the heavy heap of bed-clothes, were all designed to hold in sleep, and act as nonconductors to the day and getting up. Even the old stuffed fox upon the top of the wardrobe was devoid of any spark of vigilance, for his glass eye had fallen out, and he slumbered as he stood.

The wandering attention of the mistress of the Blue Dragon roved to these things but twice or thrice, and then for but an instant at a time. It soon deserted them, and even the distant bed with its strange burden, for the young creature immediately before her, who, with her downcast eyes intently fixed upon the fire, sat wrapped in silent meditation.

She was very young; apparently no more than seventeen; timid and shrinking in her manner, and yet with a greater share of self possession and control over her emotions than usually belongs to a far more advanced period of female life. This she had abundantly shown, but now, in her tending of the sick gentleman. She was short in stature; and her figure was slight, as became her years; but all the charms of youth and maidenhood set it off, and clustered on her gentle brow. Her face was very pale, in part no doubt from recent agitation. Her dark brown hair, disordered from the same cause, had fallen negligently from its bonds, and hung upon her neck; for which instance of its waywardness no male observer would have had the heart to blame it.

Her attire was that of a lady, but extremely plain; and in her manner, even when she sat as still as she did then, there was an indefinable something which appeared to be in kindred with her scrupulously unpretending dress. She had sat, at first looking anxiously towards the bed; but seeing that the patient remained quiet, and was busy with his writing, she had softly moved her chair into its present place; partly, as it seemed, from an instinctive consciousness that he desired to avoid observation; and partly that she might, unseen by him, give some vent to the natural feelings she had hitherto suppressed.

Of all this, and much more, the rosy landlady of the Blue Dragon took as accurate note and observation as only woman can take of woman. And at length she said, in a voice too low, she knew, to reach the bed:

'You have seen the gentleman in this way before, miss? Is he used to these attacks?'

'I have seen him very ill before, but not so ill as he has been tonight.'

'What a Providence!' said the landlady of the Dragon, 'that you had the prescriptions and the medicines with you, miss!'

'They are intended for such an emergency. We never travel without them.'

'Oh!' thought the hostess, 'then we are in the habit of travelling, and of travelling together.'

She was so conscious of expressing this in her face, that meeting the young lady's eyes immediately afterwards, and being a very honest hostess, she was rather confused.

'The gentleman – your grandpapa' – she resumed, after a short pause, 'being so bent on having no assistance, must terrify you very much, miss?'

'I have been very much alarmed to-night. He – he is not my grandfather.'

'Father, I should have said,' returned the hostess, sensible of having made an awkward mistake.

'Nor my father' said the young lady. 'Nor,' she added, slightly smiling with a quick perception of what the landlady was going to add, 'Nor my uncle. We are not related.'

'Oh dear me!' returned the landlady, still more embarrassed than before; 'how could I be so very much mistaken; knowing, as anybody in their proper senses might that when a gentleman is ill, he looks so much older than he really is? That I should have called you "Miss," too, ma'am!' But when she had proceeded thus far, she glanced involuntarily at the third finger of the young lady's left hand, and faltered again; for there was no ring upon it.

‘When I told you we were not related,’ said the other mildly, but not without confusion on her own part, ‘I meant not in any way. Not even by marriage. Did you call me, Martin?’

‘Call you?’ cried the old man, looking quickly up, and hurriedly drawing beneath the coverlet the paper on which he had been writing. ‘No.’

She had moved a pace or two towards the bed, but stopped immediately, and went no farther.

‘No,’ he repeated, with a petulant emphasis. ‘Why do you ask me? If I had called you, what need for such a question?’

‘It was the creaking of the sign outside, sir, I dare say,’ observed the landlady; a suggestion by the way (as she felt a moment after she had made it), not at all complimentary to the voice of the old gentleman.

‘No matter what, ma’am,’ he rejoined: ‘it wasn’t I. Why how you stand there, Mary, as if I had the plague! But they’re all afraid of me,’ he added, leaning helplessly backward on his pillow; ‘even she! There is a curse upon me. What else have I to look for?’

‘Oh dear, no. Oh no, I’m sure,’ said the good-tempered landlady, rising, and going towards him. ‘Be of better cheer, sir. These are only sick fancies.’

‘What are only sick fancies?’ he retorted. ‘What do you know about fancies? Who told you about fancies? The old story! Fancies!’

‘Only see again there, how you take one up!’ said the mistress of the Blue Dragon, with unimpaired good humour. ‘Dear heart alive, there is no harm in the word, sir, if it is an old one. Folks in good health have their fancies, too, and strange ones, every day.’

Harmless as this speech appeared to be, it acted on the traveller’s distrust, like oil on fire. He raised his head up in the bed, and, fixing on her two dark eyes whose brightness was exaggerated by the paleness of his hollow cheeks, as they in turn, together with his straggling locks of long grey hair, were rendered whiter by the tight black velvet skullcap which he wore, he searched her face intently.

‘Ah! you begin too soon,’ he said, in so low a voice that he seemed to be thinking it, rather than addressing her. ‘But you lose no time. You do your errand, and you earn your fee. Now, who may be your client?’

The landlady looked in great astonishment at her whom he called Mary, and finding no rejoinder in the drooping face, looked back again at him. At first she had recoiled involuntarily, supposing him disordered in his mind; but the slow composure of his manner, and the settled purpose announced in his strong features, and gathering, most of all, about his puckered mouth, forbade the supposition.

‘Come,’ he said, ‘tell me who is it? Being here, it is not very hard for me to guess, you may suppose.’

‘Martin,’ interposed the young lady, laying her hand upon his arm; ‘reflect how short a time we have been in this house, and that even your name is unknown here.’

‘Unless,’ he said, ‘you – ’ He was evidently tempted to express a suspicion of her having broken his confidence in favour of the landlady, but either remembering her tender nursing, or being moved in some sort by her face, he checked himself, and changing his uneasy posture in the bed, was silent.

‘There!’ said Mrs Lupin; for in that name the Blue Dragon was licensed to furnish entertainment, both to man and beast. ‘Now, you will be well again, sir. You forgot, for the moment, that there were none but friends here.’

‘Oh!’ cried the old man, moaning impatiently, as he tossed one restless arm upon the coverlet; ‘why do you talk to me of friends! Can you or anybody teach me to know who are my friends, and who my enemies?’

‘At least,’ urged Mrs Lupin, gently, ‘this young lady is your friend, I am sure.’

‘She has no temptation to be otherwise,’ cried the old man, like one whose hope and confidence were utterly exhausted. ‘I suppose she is. Heaven knows. There, let me try to sleep. Leave the candle where it is.’

As they retired from the bed, he drew forth the writing which had occupied him so long, and holding it in the flame of the taper burnt it to ashes. That done, he extinguished the light, and turning his face away with a heavy sigh, drew the coverlet about his head, and lay quite still.

This destruction of the paper, both as being strangely inconsistent with the labour he had devoted to it, and as involving considerable danger of fire to the Dragon, occasioned Mrs Lupin not a little consternation. But the young lady evincing no surprise, curiosity, or alarm, whispered her, with many thanks for her solicitude and company, that she would remain there some time longer; and that she begged her not to share her watch, as she was well used to being alone, and would pass the time in reading.

Mrs Lupin had her full share and dividend of that large capital of curiosity which is inherited by her sex, and at another time it might have been difficult so to impress this hint upon her as to induce her to take it. But now, in sheer wonder and amazement at these mysteries, she withdrew at once, and repairing straightway to her own little parlour below stairs, sat down in her easy-chair with unnatural composure. At this very crisis, a step was heard in the entry, and Mr Pecksniff, looking sweetly over the half-door of the bar, and into the vista of snug privacy beyond, murmured:

'Good evening, Mrs Lupin!'

'Oh dear me, sir!' she cried, advancing to receive him, 'I am so very glad you have come.'

'And I am very glad I have come,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'if I can be of service. I am very glad I have come. What is the matter, Mrs Lupin?'

'A gentleman taken ill upon the road, has been so very bad upstairs, sir,' said the tearful hostess.

'A gentleman taken ill upon the road, has been so very bad upstairs, has he?' repeated Mr Pecksniff. 'Well, well!'

Now there was nothing that one may call decidedly original in this remark, nor can it be exactly said to have contained any wise precept theretofore unknown to mankind, or to have opened any hidden source of consolation; but Mr Pecksniff's manner was so bland, and he nodded his head so soothingly, and showed in everything such an affable sense of his own excellence, that anybody would have been, as Mrs Lupin was, comforted by the mere voice and presence of such a man; and, though he had merely said 'a verb must agree with its nominative case in number and person, my good friend,' or 'eight times eight are sixty-four, my worthy soul,' must have felt deeply grateful to him for his humanity and wisdom.

'And how,' asked Mr Pecksniff, drawing off his gloves and warming his hands before the fire, as benevolently as if they were somebody else's, not his; 'and how is he now?'

'He is better, and quite tranquil,' answered Mrs Lupin.

'He is better, and quite tranquil,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Very well! Ve-ry well!'

Here again, though the statement was Mrs Lupin's and not Mr Pecksniff's, Mr Pecksniff made it his own and consoled her with it. It was not much when Mrs Lupin said it, but it was a whole book when Mr Pecksniff said it. 'I observe,' he seemed to say, 'and through me, morality in general remarks, that he is better and quite tranquil.'

'There must be weighty matters on his mind, though,' said the hostess, shaking her head, 'for he talks, sir, in the strangest way you ever heard. He is far from easy in his thoughts, and wants some proper advice from those whose goodness makes it worth his having.'

'Then,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'he is the sort of customer for me.' But though he said this in the plainest language, he didn't speak a word. He only shook his head; disparagingly of himself too.

'I am afraid, sir,' continued the landlady, first looking round to assure herself that there was nobody within hearing, and then looking down upon the floor. 'I am very much afraid, sir, that his conscience is troubled by his not being related to – or – or even married to – a very young lady – '

'Mrs Lupin!' said Mr Pecksniff, holding up his hand with something in his manner as nearly approaching to severity as any expression of his, mild being that he was, could ever do. 'Person! young person?'

‘A very young person,’ said Mrs Lupin, curtseying and blushing; ‘ – I beg your pardon, sir, but I have been so hurried to-night, that I don’t know what I say – who is with him now.’

‘Who is with him now,’ ruminated Mr Pecksniff, warming his back (as he had warmed his hands) as if it were a widow’s back, or an orphan’s back, or an enemy’s back, or a back that any less excellent man would have suffered to be cold. ‘Oh dear me, dear me!’

‘At the same time I am bound to say, and I do say with all my heart,’ observed the hostess, earnestly, ‘that her looks and manner almost disarm suspicion.’

‘Your suspicion, Mrs Lupin,’ said Mr Pecksniff gravely, ‘is very natural.’

Touching which remark, let it be written down to their confusion, that the enemies of this worthy man unblushingly maintained that he always said of what was very bad, that it was very natural; and that he unconsciously betrayed his own nature in doing so.

‘Your suspicion, Mrs Lupin,’ he repeated, ‘is very natural, and I have no doubt correct. I will wait upon these travellers.’

With that he took off his great-coat, and having run his fingers through his hair, thrust one hand gently in the bosom of his waist-coat and meekly signed to her to lead the way.

‘Shall I knock?’ asked Mrs Lupin, when they reached the chamber door.

‘No,’ said Mr Pecksniff, ‘enter if you please.’

They went in on tiptoe; or rather the hostess took that precaution for Mr Pecksniff always walked softly. The old gentleman was still asleep, and his young companion still sat reading by the fire.

‘I am afraid,’ said Mr Pecksniff, pausing at the door, and giving his head a melancholy roll, ‘I am afraid that this looks artful. I am afraid, Mrs Lupin, do you know, that this looks very artful!’

As he finished this whisper, he advanced before the hostess; and at the same time the young lady, hearing footsteps, rose. Mr Pecksniff glanced at the volume she held, and whispered Mrs Lupin again; if possible, with increased despondency.

‘Yes, ma’am,’ he said, ‘it is a good book. I was fearful of that beforehand. I am apprehensive that this is a very deep thing indeed!’

‘What gentleman is this?’ inquired the object of his virtuous doubts.

‘Hush! don’t trouble yourself, ma’am,’ said Mr Pecksniff, as the landlady was about to answer. ‘This young’ – in spite of himself he hesitated when “person” rose to his lips, and substituted another word: ‘this young stranger, Mrs Lupin, will excuse me for replying briefly, that I reside in this village; it may be in an influential manner, however, undeserved; and that I have been summoned here by you. I am here, as I am everywhere, I hope, in sympathy for the sick and sorry.’

With these impressive words, Mr Pecksniff passed over to the bedside, where, after patting the counterpane once or twice in a very solemn manner, as if by that means he gained a clear insight into the patient’s disorder, he took his seat in a large arm-chair, and in an attitude of some thoughtfulness and much comfort, waited for his waking. Whatever objection the young lady urged to Mrs Lupin went no further, for nothing more was said to Mr Pecksniff, and Mr Pecksniff said nothing more to anybody else.

Full half an hour elapsed before the old man stirred, but at length he turned himself in bed, and, though not yet awake, gave tokens that his sleep was drawing to an end. By little and little he removed the bed-clothes from about his head, and turned still more towards the side where Mr Pecksniff sat. In course of time his eyes opened; and he lay for a few moments as people newly roused sometimes will, gazing indolently at his visitor, without any distinct consciousness of his presence.

There was nothing remarkable in these proceedings, except the influence they worked on Mr Pecksniff, which could hardly have been surpassed by the most marvellous of natural phenomena. Gradually his hands became tightly clasped upon the elbows of the chair, his eyes dilated with surprise, his mouth opened, his hair stood more erect upon his forehead than its custom was, until, at length, when the old man rose in bed, and stared at him with scarcely less emotion than he showed himself, the Pecksniff doubts were all resolved, and he exclaimed aloud:

'You *are* Martin Chuzzlewit!'

His consternation of surprise was so genuine, that the old man, with all the disposition that he clearly entertained to believe it assumed, was convinced of its reality.

'I am Martin Chuzzlewit,' he said, bitterly: 'and Martin Chuzzlewit wishes you had been hanged, before you had come here to disturb him in his sleep. Why, I dreamed of this fellow!' he said, lying down again, and turning away his face, 'before I knew that he was near me!'

'My good cousin – ' said Mr Pecksniff.

'There! His very first words!' cried the old man, shaking his grey head to and fro upon the pillow, and throwing up his hands. 'In his very first words he asserts his relationship! I knew he would; they all do it! Near or distant, blood or water, it's all one. Ugh! What a calendar of deceit, and lying, and false-witnessing, the sound of any word of kindred opens before me!'

'Pray do not be hasty, Mr Chuzzlewit,' said Pecksniff, in a tone that was at once in the sublimest degree compassionate and dispassionate; for he had by this time recovered from his surprise, and was in full possession of his virtuous self. 'You will regret being hasty, I know you will.'

'You know!' said Martin, contemptuously.

'Yes,' retorted Mr Pecksniff. 'Aye, aye, Mr Chuzzlewit; and don't imagine that I mean to court or flatter you; for nothing is further from my intention. Neither, sir, need you entertain the least misgiving that I shall repeat that obnoxious word which has given you so much offence already. Why should I? What do I expect or want from you? There is nothing in your possession that I know of, Mr Chuzzlewit, which is much to be coveted for the happiness it brings you.'

'That's true enough,' muttered the old man.

'Apart from that consideration,' said Mr Pecksniff, watchful of the effect he made, 'it must be plain to you (I am sure) by this time, that if I had wished to insinuate myself into your good opinion, I should have been, of all things, careful not to address you as a relative; knowing your humour, and being quite certain beforehand that I could not have a worse letter of recommendation.'

Martin made not any verbal answer; but he as clearly implied though only by a motion of his legs beneath the bed-clothes, that there was reason in this, and that he could not dispute it, as if he had said as much in good set terms.

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff, keeping his hand in his waistcoat as though he were ready, on the shortest notice, to produce his heart for Martin Chuzzlewit's inspection, 'I came here to offer my services to a stranger. I make no offer of them to you, because I know you would distrust me if I did. But lying on that bed, sir, I regard you as a stranger, and I have just that amount of interest in you which I hope I should feel in any stranger, circumstanced as you are. Beyond that, I am quite as indifferent to you, Mr Chuzzlewit, as you are to me.'

Having said which, Mr Pecksniff threw himself back in the easy-chair; so radiant with ingenuous honesty, that Mrs Lupin almost wondered not to see a stained-glass Glory, such as the Saint wore in the church, shining about his head.

A long pause succeeded. The old man, with increased restlessness, changed his posture several times. Mrs Lupin and the young lady gazed in silence at the counterpane. Mr Pecksniff toyed abstractedly with his eye-glass, and kept his eyes shut, that he might ruminate the better.

'Eh?' he said at last, opening them suddenly, and looking towards the bed. 'I beg your pardon. I thought you spoke. Mrs Lupin,' he continued, slowly rising 'I am not aware that I can be of any service to you here. The gentleman is better, and you are as good a nurse as he can have. Eh?'

This last note of interrogation bore reference to another change of posture on the old man's part, which brought his face towards Mr Pecksniff for the first time since he had turned away from him.

'If you desire to speak to me before I go, sir,' continued that gentleman, after another pause, 'you may command my leisure; but I must stipulate, in justice to myself, that you do so as to a stranger, strictly as to a stranger.'

Now if Mr Pecksniff knew, from anything Martin Chuzzlewit had expressed in gestures, that he wanted to speak to him, he could only have found it out on some such principle as prevails in melodramas, and in virtue of which the elderly farmer with the comic son always knows what the dumb girl means when she takes refuge in his garden, and relates her personal memoirs in incomprehensible pantomime. But without stopping to make any inquiry on this point, Martin Chuzzlewit signed to his young companion to withdraw, which she immediately did, along with the landlady leaving him and Mr Pecksniff alone together. For some time they looked at each other in silence; or rather the old man looked at Mr Pecksniff, and Mr Pecksniff again closing his eyes on all outward objects, took an inward survey of his own breast. That it amply repaid him for his trouble, and afforded a delicious and enchanting prospect, was clear from the expression of his face.

'You wish me to speak to you as to a total stranger,' said the old man, 'do you?'

Mr Pecksniff replied, by a shrug of his shoulders and an apparent turning round of his eyes in their sockets before he opened them, that he was still reduced to the necessity of entertaining that desire.

'You shall be gratified,' said Martin. 'Sir, I am a rich man. Not so rich as some suppose, perhaps, but yet wealthy. I am not a miser sir, though even that charge is made against me, as I hear, and currently believed. I have no pleasure in hoarding. I have no pleasure in the possession of money, The devil that we call by that name can give me nothing but unhappiness.'

It would be no description of Mr Pecksniff's gentleness of manner to adopt the common parlance, and say that he looked at this moment as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. He rather looked as if any quantity of butter might have been made out of him, by churning the milk of human kindness, as it spouted upwards from his heart.

'For the same reason that I am not a hoarder of money,' said the old man, 'I am not lavish of it. Some people find their gratification in storing it up; and others theirs in parting with it; but I have no gratification connected with the thing. Pain and bitterness are the only goods it ever could procure for me. I hate it. It is a spectre walking before me through the world, and making every social pleasure hideous.'

A thought arose in Pecksniff's mind, which must have instantly mounted to his face, or Martin Chuzzlewit would not have resumed as quickly and as sternly as he did:

'You would advise me for my peace of mind, to get rid of this source of misery, and transfer it to some one who could bear it better. Even you, perhaps, would rid me of a burden under which I suffer so grievously. But, kind stranger,' said the old man, whose every feature darkened as he spoke, 'good Christian stranger, that is a main part of my trouble. In other hands, I have known money do good; in other hands I have known it triumphed in, and boasted of with reason, as the master-key to all the brazen gates that close upon the paths to worldly honour, fortune, and enjoyment. To what man or woman; to what worthy, honest, incorruptible creature; shall I confide such a talisman, either now or when I die? Do you know any such person? *your* virtues are of course inestimable, but can you tell me of any other living creature who will bear the test of contact with myself?'

'Of contact with yourself, sir?' echoed Mr Pecksniff.

'Aye,' returned the old man, 'the test of contact with me – with me. You have heard of him whose misery (the gratification of his own foolish wish) was, that he turned every thing he touched into gold. The curse of my existence, and the realisation of my own mad desire is that by the golden standard which I bear about me, I am doomed to try the metal of all other men, and find it false and hollow.'

Mr Pecksniff shook his head, and said, 'You think so.'

'Oh yes,' cried the old man, 'I think so! and in your telling me "I think so," I recognize the true unworldly ring of *your* metal. I tell you, man,' he added, with increasing bitterness, 'that I have gone, a rich man, among people of all grades and kinds; relatives, friends, and strangers; among people in whom, when I was poor, I had confidence, and justly, for they never once deceived me then, or, to

me, wronged each other. But I have never found one nature, no, not one, in which, being wealthy and alone, I was not forced to detect the latent corruption that lay hid within it waiting for such as I to bring it forth. Treachery, deceit, and low design; hatred of competitors, real or fancied, for my favour; meanness, falsehood, baseness, and servility; or,' and here he looked closely in his cousin's eyes, 'or an assumption of honest independence, almost worse than all; these are the beauties which my wealth has brought to light. Brother against brother, child against parent, friends treading on the faces of friends, this is the social company by whom my way has been attended. There are stories told – they may be true or false – of rich men who, in the garb of poverty, have found out virtue and rewarded it. They were dolts and idiots for their pains. They should have made the search in their own characters. They should have shown themselves fit objects to be robbed and preyed upon and plotted against and adulated by any knaves, who, but for joy, would have spat upon their coffins when they died their dupes; and then their search would have ended as mine has done, and they would be what I am.'

Mr Pecksniff, not at all knowing what it might be best to say in the momentary pause which ensued upon these remarks, made an elaborate demonstration of intending to deliver something very oracular indeed; trusting to the certainty of the old man interrupting him, before he should utter a word. Nor was he mistaken, for Martin Chuzzlewit having taken breath, went on to say:

'Hear me to an end; judge what profit you are like to gain from any repetition of this visit; and leave me. I have so corrupted and changed the nature of all those who have ever attended on me, by breeding avaricious plots and hopes within them; I have engendered such domestic strife and discord, by tarrying even with members of my own family; I have been such a lighted torch in peaceful homes, kindling up all the inflammable gases and vapours in their moral atmosphere, which, but for me, might have proved harmless to the end, that I have, I may say, fled from all who knew me, and taking refuge in secret places have lived, of late, the life of one who is hunted. The young girl whom you just now saw – what! your eye lightens when I talk of her! You hate her already, do you?'

'Upon my word, sir!' said Mr Pecksniff, laying his hand upon his breast, and dropping his eyelids.

'I forgot,' cried the old man, looking at him with a keenness which the other seemed to feel, although he did not raise his eyes so as to see it. 'I ask your pardon. I forgot you were a stranger. For the moment you reminded me of one Pecksniff, a cousin of mine. As I was saying – the young girl whom you just now saw, is an orphan child, whom, with one steady purpose, I have bred and educated, or, if you prefer the word, adopted. For a year or more she has been my constant companion, and she is my only one. I have taken, as she knows, a solemn oath never to leave her sixpence when I die, but while I live I make her an annual allowance; not extravagant in its amount and yet not stinted. There is a compact between us that no term of affectionate cajolery shall ever be addressed by either to the other, but that she shall call me always by my Christian name; I her, by hers. She is bound to me in life by ties of interest, and losing by my death, and having no expectation disappointed, will mourn it, perhaps; though for that I care little. This is the only kind of friend I have or will have. Judge from such premises what a profitable hour you have spent in coming here, and leave me, to return no more.'

With these words, the old man fell slowly back upon his pillow. Mr Pecksniff as slowly rose, and, with a prefatory hem, began as follows:

'Mr Chuzzlewit.'

'There. Go!' interposed the other. 'Enough of this. I am weary of you.'

'I am sorry for that, sir,' rejoined Mr Pecksniff, 'because I have a duty to discharge, from which, depend upon it, I shall not shrink. No, sir, I shall not shrink.'

It is a lamentable fact, that as Mr Pecksniff stood erect beside the bed, in all the dignity of Goodness, and addressed him thus, the old man cast an angry glance towards the candlestick, as if he were possessed by a strong inclination to launch it at his cousin's head. But he constrained himself, and pointing with his finger to the door, informed him that his road lay there.

'Thank you,' said Mr Pecksniff; 'I am aware of that. I am going. But before I go, I crave your leave to speak, and more than that, Mr Chuzzlewit, I must and will – yes indeed, I repeat it, must and will – be heard. I am not surprised, sir, at anything you have told me tonight. It is natural, very natural, and the greater part of it was known to me before. I will not say,' continued Mr Pecksniff, drawing out his pocket-handkerchief, and winking with both eyes at once, as it were, against his will, 'I will not say that you are mistaken in me. While you are in your present mood I would not say so for the world. I almost wish, indeed, that I had a different nature, that I might repress even this slight confession of weakness; which I cannot disguise from you; which I feel is humiliating; but which you will have the goodness to excuse. We will say, if you please,' added Mr Pecksniff, with great tenderness of manner, 'that it arises from a cold in the head, or is attributable to snuff, or smelling-salts, or onions, or anything but the real cause.'

Here he paused for an instant, and concealed his face behind his pocket-handkerchief. Then, smiling faintly, and holding the bed furniture with one hand, he resumed:

'But, Mr Chuzzlewit, while I am forgetful of myself, I owe it to myself, and to my character – aye, sir, and I *have* a character which is very dear to me, and will be the best inheritance of my two daughters – to tell you, on behalf of another, that your conduct is wrong, unnatural, indefensible, monstrous. And I tell you, sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, towering on tiptoe among the curtains, as if he were literally rising above all worldly considerations, and were fain to hold on tight, to keep himself from darting skyward like a rocket, 'I tell you without fear or favour, that it will not do for you to be unmindful of your grandson, young Martin, who has the strongest natural claim upon you. It will not do, sir,' repeated Mr Pecksniff, shaking his head. 'You may think it will do, but it won't. You must provide for that young man; you shall provide for him; you *will* provide for him. I believe,' said Mr Pecksniff, glancing at the pen-and-ink, 'that in secret you have already done so. Bless you for doing so. Bless you for doing right, sir. Bless you for hating me. And good night!'

So saying, Mr Pecksniff waved his right hand with much solemnity, and once more inserting it in his waistcoat, departed. There was emotion in his manner, but his step was firm. Subject to human weaknesses, he was upheld by conscience.

Martin lay for some time, with an expression on his face of silent wonder, not unmixed with rage; at length he muttered in a whisper:

'What does this mean? Can the false-hearted boy have chosen such a tool as yonder fellow who has just gone out? Why not! He has conspired against me, like the rest, and they are but birds of one feather. A new plot; a new plot! Oh self, self, self! At every turn nothing but self!'

He fell to trifling, as he ceased to speak, with the ashes of the burnt paper in the candlestick. He did so, at first, in pure abstraction, but they presently became the subject of his thoughts.

'Another will made and destroyed,' he said, 'nothing determined on, nothing done, and I might have died to-night! I plainly see to what foul uses all this money will be put at last,' he cried, almost writhing in the bed; 'after filling me with cares and miseries all my life, it will perpetuate discord and bad passions when I am dead. So it always is. What lawsuits grow out of the graves of rich men, every day; sowing perjury, hatred, and lies among near kindred, where there should be nothing but love! Heaven help us, we have much to answer for! Oh self, self, self! Every man for himself, and no creature for me!'

Universal self! Was there nothing of its shadow in these reflections, and in the history of Martin Chuzzlewit, on his own showing?

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM WHICH IT WILL APPEAR THAT IF UNION BE STRENGTH, AND FAMILY AFFECTION BE PLEASANT TO CONTEMPLATE, THE CHUZZLEWITS WERE THE STRONGEST AND MOST AGREEABLE FAMILY IN THE WORLD

That worthy man Mr Pecksniff having taken leave of his cousin in the solemn terms recited in the last chapter, withdrew to his own home, and remained there three whole days; not so much as going out for a walk beyond the boundaries of his own garden, lest he should be hastily summoned to the bedside of his penitent and remorseful relative, whom, in his ample benevolence, he had made up his mind to forgive unconditionally, and to love on any terms. But such was the obstinacy and such the bitter nature of that stern old man, that no repentant summons came; and the fourth day found Mr Pecksniff apparently much farther from his Christian object than the first.

During the whole of this interval, he haunted the Dragon at all times and seasons in the day and night, and, returning good for evil evinced the deepest solicitude in the progress of the obdurate invalid, in so much that Mrs Lupin was fairly melted by his disinterested anxiety (for he often particularly required her to take notice that he would do the same by any stranger or pauper in the like condition), and shed many tears of admiration and delight.

Meantime, old Martin Chuzzlewit remained shut up in his own chamber, and saw no person but his young companion, saving the hostess of the Blue Dragon, who was, at certain times, admitted to his presence. So surely as she came into the room, however, Martin feigned to fall asleep. It was only when he and the young lady were alone, that he would utter a word, even in answer to the simplest inquiry; though Mr Pecksniff could make out, by hard listening at the door, that they two being left together, he was talkative enough.

It happened on the fourth evening, that Mr Pecksniff walking, as usual, into the bar of the Dragon and finding no Mrs Lupin there, went straight upstairs; purposing, in the fervour of his affectionate zeal, to apply his ear once more to the keyhole, and quiet his mind by assuring himself that the hard-hearted patient was going on well. It happened that Mr Pecksniff, coming softly upon the dark passage into which a spiral ray of light usually darted through the same keyhole, was astonished to find no such ray visible; and it happened that Mr Pecksniff, when he had felt his way to the chamber-door, stooping hurriedly down to ascertain by personal inspection whether the jealousy of the old man had caused this keyhole to be stopped on the inside, brought his head into such violent contact with another head that he could not help uttering in an audible voice the monosyllable ‘Oh!’ which was, as it were, sharply unscrewed and jerked out of him by very anguish. It happened then, and lastly, that Mr Pecksniff found himself immediately collared by something which smelt like several damp umbrellas, a barrel of beer, a cask of warm brandy-and-water, and a small parlour-full of stale tobacco smoke, mixed; and was straightway led downstairs into the bar from which he had lately come, where he found himself standing opposite to, and in the grasp of, a perfectly strange gentleman of still stranger appearance who, with his disengaged hand, rubbed his own head very hard, and looked at him, Pecksniff, with an evil countenance.

The gentleman was of that order of appearance which is currently termed shabby-genteel, though in respect of his dress he can hardly be said to have been in any extremities, as his fingers were a long way out of his gloves, and the soles of his feet were at an inconvenient distance from the upper leather of his boots. His nether garments were of a bluish grey – violent in its colours once, but sobered now by age and dinginess – and were so stretched and strained in a tough conflict between his braces and his straps, that they appeared every moment in danger of flying asunder at the knees. His coat, in colour blue and of a military cut, was buttoned and frogged up to his chin. His cravat was,

in hue and pattern, like one of those mantles which hairdressers are accustomed to wrap about their clients, during the progress of the professional mysteries. His hat had arrived at such a pass that it would have been hard to determine whether it was originally white or black. But he wore a moustache – a shaggy moustache too; nothing in the meek and merciful way, but quite in the fierce and scornful style; the regular Satanic sort of thing – and he wore, besides, a vast quantity of unbrushed hair. He was very dirty and very jaunty; very bold and very mean; very swaggering and very slinking; very much like a man who might have been something better, and unspeakably like a man who deserved to be something worse.

'You were eaves-dropping at that door, you vagabond!' said this gentleman.

Mr Pecksniff cast him off, as Saint George might have repudiated the Dragon in that animal's last moments, and said:

'Where is Mrs Lupin, I wonder! can the good woman possibly be aware that there is a person here who – '

'Stay!' said the gentleman. 'Wait a bit. She *does* know. What then?'

'What then, sir?' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'What then? Do you know, sir, that I am the friend and relative of that sick gentleman? That I am his protector, his guardian, his – '

'Not his niece's husband,' interposed the stranger, 'I'll be sworn; for he was there before you.'

'What do you mean?' said Mr Pecksniff, with indignant surprise. 'What do you tell me, sir?'

'Wait a bit!' cried the other, 'Perhaps you are a cousin – the cousin who lives in this place?'

'I *am* the cousin who lives in this place,' replied the man of worth.

'Your name is Pecksniff?' said the gentleman.

'It is.'

'I am proud to know you, and I ask your pardon,' said the gentleman, touching his hat, and subsequently diving behind his cravat for a shirt-collar, which however he did not succeed in bringing to the surface. 'You behold in me, sir, one who has also an interest in that gentleman upstairs. Wait a bit.'

As he said this, he touched the tip of his high nose, by way of intimation that he would let Mr Pecksniff into a secret presently; and pulling off his hat, began to search inside the crown among a mass of crumpled documents and small pieces of what may be called the bark of broken cigars; whence he presently selected the cover of an old letter, begrimed with dirt and redolent of tobacco.

'Read that,' he cried, giving it to Mr Pecksniff.

'This is addressed to Chevy Slyme, Esquire,' said that gentleman.

'You know Chevy Slyme, Esquire, I believe?' returned the stranger.

Mr Pecksniff shrugged his shoulders as though he would say 'I know there is such a person, and I am sorry for it.'

'Very good,' remarked the gentleman. 'That is my interest and business here.' With that he made another dive for his shirt-collar and brought up a string.

'Now, this is very distressing, my friend,' said Mr Pecksniff, shaking his head and smiling composedly. 'It is very distressing to me, to be compelled to say that you are not the person you claim to be. I know Mr Slyme, my friend; this will not do; honesty is the best policy you had better not; you had indeed.'

'Stop' cried the gentleman, stretching forth his right arm, which was so tightly wedged into his threadbare sleeve that it looked like a cloth sausage. 'Wait a bit!'

He paused to establish himself immediately in front of the fire with his back towards it. Then gathering the skirts of his coat under his left arm, and smoothing his moustache with his right thumb and forefinger, he resumed:

'I understand your mistake, and I am not offended. Why? Because it's complimentary. You suppose I would set myself up for Chevy Slyme. Sir, if there is a man on earth whom a gentleman would feel proud and honoured to be mistaken for, that man is my friend Slyme. For he is,

without an exception, the highest-minded, the most independent-spirited, most original, spiritual, classical, talented, the most thoroughly Shakspearian, if not Miltonic, and at the same time the most disgustingly-unappreciated dog I know. But, sir, I have not the vanity to attempt to pass for Slyme. Any other man in the wide world, I am equal to; but Slyme is, I frankly confess, a great many cuts above me. Therefore you are wrong.'

'I judged from this,' said Mr Pecksniff, holding out the cover of the letter.

'No doubt you did,' returned the gentleman. 'But, Mr Pecksniff, the whole thing resolves itself into an instance of the peculiarities of genius. Every man of true genius has his peculiarity. Sir, the peculiarity of my friend Slyme is, that he is always waiting round the corner. He is perpetually round the corner, sir. He is round the corner at this instant. Now,' said the gentleman, shaking his forefinger before his nose, and planting his legs wider apart as he looked attentively in Mr Pecksniff's face, 'that is a remarkably curious and interesting trait in Mr Slyme's character; and whenever Slyme's life comes to be written, that trait must be thoroughly worked out by his biographer or society will not be satisfied. Observe me, society will not be satisfied!'

Mr Pecksniff coughed.

'Slyme's biographer, sir, whoever he may be,' resumed the gentleman, 'must apply to me; or, if I am gone to that what's-his-name from which no thingumbob comes back, he must apply to my executors for leave to search among my papers. I have taken a few notes in my poor way, of some of that man's proceedings – my adopted brother, sir, – which would amaze you. He made use of an expression, sir, only on the fifteenth of last month when he couldn't meet a little bill and the other party wouldn't renew, which would have done honour to Napoleon Bonaparte in addressing the French army.'

'And pray,' asked Mr Pecksniff, obviously not quite at his ease, 'what may be Mr Slyme's business here, if I may be permitted to inquire, who am compelled by a regard for my own character to disavow all interest in his proceedings?'

'In the first place,' returned the gentleman, 'you will permit me to say, that I object to that remark, and that I strongly and indignantly protest against it on behalf of my friend Slyme. In the next place, you will give me leave to introduce myself. My name, sir, is Tigg. The name of Montague Tigg will perhaps be familiar to you, in connection with the most remarkable events of the Peninsular War?'

Mr Pecksniff gently shook his head.

'No matter,' said the gentleman. 'That man was my father, and I bear his name. I am consequently proud – proud as Lucifer. Excuse me one moment. I desire my friend Slyme to be present at the remainder of this conference.'

With this announcement he hurried away to the outer door of the Blue Dragon, and almost immediately returned with a companion shorter than himself, who was wrapped in an old blue camlet cloak with a lining of faded scarlet. His sharp features being much pinched and nipped by long waiting in the cold, and his straggling red whiskers and frowzy hair being more than usually dishevelled from the same cause, he certainly looked rather unwholesome and uncomfortable than Shakspearian or Miltonic.

'Now,' said Mr Tigg, clapping one hand on the shoulder of his prepossessing friend, and calling Mr Pecksniff's attention to him with the other, 'you two are related; and relations never did agree, and never will; which is a wise dispensation and an inevitable thing, or there would be none but family parties, and everybody in the world would bore everybody else to death. If you were on good terms, I should consider you a most confoundedly unnatural pair; but standing towards each other as you do, I took upon you as a couple of devilish deep-thoughted fellows, who may be reasoned with to any extent.'

Here Mr Chevy Slyme, whose great abilities seemed one and all to point towards the sneaking quarter of the moral compass, nudged his friend stealthily with his elbow, and whispered in his ear.

'Chiv,' said Mr Tigg aloud, in the high tone of one who was not to be tampered with. 'I shall come to that presently. I act upon my own responsibility, or not at all. To the extent of such a trifling loan as a crownpiece to a man of your talents, I look upon Mr Pecksniff as certain;' and seeing at this juncture that the expression of Mr Pecksniff's face by no means betokened that he shared this certainty, Mr Tigg laid his finger on his nose again for that gentleman's private and especial behoof; calling upon him thereby to take notice that the requisition of small loans was another instance of the peculiarities of genius as developed in his friend Slyme; that he, Tigg, winked at the same, because of the strong metaphysical interest which these weaknesses possessed; and that in reference to his own personal advocacy of such small advances, he merely consulted the humour of his friend, without the least regard to his own advantage or necessities.

'Oh, Chiv, Chiv!' added Mr Tigg, surveying his adopted brother with an air of profound contemplation after dismissing this piece of pantomime. 'You are, upon my life, a strange instance of the little frailties that beset a mighty mind. If there had never been a telescope in the world, I should have been quite certain from my observation of you, Chiv, that there were spots on the sun! I wish I may die, if this isn't the queerest state of existence that we find ourselves forced into without knowing why or wherefore, Mr Pecksniff! Well, never mind! Moralise as we will, the world goes on. As Hamlet says, Hercules may lay about him with his club in every possible direction, but he can't prevent the cats from making a most intolerable row on the roofs of the houses, or the dogs from being shot in the hot weather if they run about the streets unmuzzled. Life's a riddle; a most infernally hard riddle to guess, Mr Pecksniff. My own opinions, that like that celebrated conundrum, "Why's a man in jail like a man out of jail?" there's no answer to it. Upon my soul and body, it's the queerest sort of thing altogether – but there's no use in talking about it. Ha! Ha!'

With which consolatory deduction from the gloomy premises recited, Mr Tigg roused himself by a great effort, and proceeded in his former strain.

'Now I'll tell you what it is. I'm a most confoundedly soft-hearted kind of fellow in my way, and I cannot stand by, and see you two blades cutting each other's throats when there's nothing to be got by it. Mr Pecksniff, you're the cousin of the testator upstairs and we're the nephew – I say we, meaning Chiv. Perhaps in all essential points you are more nearly related to him than we are. Very good. If so, so be it. But you can't get at him, neither can we. I give you my brightest word of honour, sir, that I've been looking through that keyhole with short intervals of rest, ever since nine o'clock this morning, in expectation of receiving an answer to one of the most moderate and gentlemanly applications for a little temporary assistance – only fifteen pounds, and *my* security – that the mind of man can conceive. In the meantime, sir, he is perpetually closeted with, and pouring his whole confidence into the bosom of, a stranger. Now I say decisively with regard to this state of circumstances, that it won't do; that it won't act; that it can't be; and that it must not be suffered to continue.'

'Every man,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'has a right, an undoubted right, (which I, for one, would not call in question for any earthly consideration; oh no!) to regulate his own proceedings by his own likings and dislikings, supposing they are not immoral and not irreligious. I may feel in my own breast, that Mr Chuzzlewit does not regard – me, for instance; say me – with exactly that amount of Christian love which should subsist between us. I may feel grieved and hurt at the circumstance; still I may not rush to the conclusion that Mr Chuzzlewit is wholly without a justification in all his coldnesses. Heaven forbid! Besides; how, Mr Tigg,' continued Pecksniff even more gravely and impressively than he had spoken yet, 'how could Mr Chuzzlewit be prevented from having these peculiar and most extraordinary confidences of which you speak; the existence of which I must admit; and which I cannot but deplore – for his sake? Consider, my good sir – ' and here Mr Pecksniff eyed him wistfully – 'how very much at random you are talking.'

'Why, as to that,' rejoined Tigg, 'it certainly is a difficult question.'

'Undoubtedly it is a difficult question,' Mr Pecksniff answered. As he spoke he drew himself aloft, and seemed to grow more mindful, suddenly, of the moral gulf between himself and the creature

he addressed. 'Undoubtedly it is a very difficult question. And I am far from feeling sure that it is a question any one is authorized to discuss. Good evening to you.'

'You don't know that the Spottletoes are here, I suppose?' said Mr Tigg.

'What do you mean, sir? what Spottletoes?' asked Pecksniff, stopping abruptly on his way to the door.

'Mr and Mrs Spottletoe,' said Chevy Slyme, Esquire, speaking aloud for the first time, and speaking very sulkily; shambling with his legs the while. 'Spottletoe married my father's brother's child, didn't he? And Mrs Spottletoe is Chuzzlewit's own niece, isn't she? She was his favourite once. You may well ask what Spottletoes.'

'Now upon my sacred word!' cried Mr Pecksniff, looking upwards. 'This is dreadful. The rapacity of these people is absolutely frightful!'

'It's not only the Spottletoes either, Tigg,' said Slyme, looking at that gentleman and speaking at Mr Pecksniff. 'Anthony Chuzzlewit and his son have got wind of it, and have come down this afternoon. I saw 'em not five minutes ago, when I was waiting round the corner.'

'Oh, Mammon, Mammon!' cried Mr Pecksniff, smiting his forehead.

'So there,' said Slyme, regardless of the interruption, 'are his brother and another nephew for you, already.'

'This is the whole thing, sir,' said Mr Tigg; 'this is the point and purpose at which I was gradually arriving when my friend Slyme here, with six words, hit it full. Mr Pecksniff, now that your cousin (and Chiv's uncle) has turned up, some steps must be taken to prevent his disappearing again; and, if possible, to counteract the influence which is exercised over him now, by this designing favourite. Everybody who is interested feels it, sir. The whole family is pouring down to this place. The time has come when individual jealousies and interests must be forgotten for a time, sir, and union must be made against the common enemy. When the common enemy is routed, you will all set up for yourselves again; every lady and gentleman who has a part in the game, will go in on their own account and bowl away, to the best of their ability, at the testator's wicket, and nobody will be in a worse position than before. Think of it. Don't commit yourself now. You'll find us at the Half Moon and Seven Stars in this village, at any time, and open to any reasonable proposition. Hem! Chiv, my dear fellow, go out and see what sort of a night it is.'

Mr Slyme lost no time in disappearing, and it is to be presumed in going round the corner. Mr Tigg, planting his legs as wide apart as he could be reasonably expected by the most sanguine man to keep them, shook his head at Mr Pecksniff and smiled.

'We must not be too hard,' he said, 'upon the little eccentricities of our friend Slyme. You saw him whisper me?'

Mr Pecksniff had seen him.

'You heard my answer, I think?'

Mr Pecksniff had heard it.

'Five shillings, eh?' said Mr Tigg, thoughtfully. 'Ah! what an extraordinary fellow! Very moderate too!'

Mr Pecksniff made no answer.

'Five shillings!' pursued Mr Tigg, musing; 'and to be punctually repaid next week; that's the best of it. You heard that?'

Mr Pecksniff had not heard that.

'No! You surprise me!' cried Tigg. 'That's the cream of the thing sir. I never knew that man fail to redeem a promise, in my life. You're not in want of change, are you?'

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'thank you. Not at all.'

'Just so,' returned Mr Tigg. 'If you had been, I'd have got it for you.' With that he began to whistle; but a dozen seconds had not elapsed when he stopped short, and looking earnestly at Mr Pecksniff, said:

'Perhaps you'd rather not lend Slyme five shillings?'

'I would much rather not,' Mr Pecksniff rejoined.

'Egad!' cried Tigg, gravely nodding his head as if some ground of objection occurred to him at that moment for the first time, 'it's very possible you may be right. Would you entertain the same sort of objection to lending me five shillings now?'

'Yes, I couldn't do it, indeed,' said Mr Pecksniff.

'Not even half-a-crown, perhaps?' urged Mr Tigg.

'Not even half-a-crown.'

'Why, then we come,' said Mr Tigg, 'to the ridiculously small amount of eighteen pence. Ha! ha!'

'And that,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'would be equally objectionable.'

On receipt of this assurance, Mr Tigg shook him heartily by both hands, protesting with much earnestness, that he was one of the most consistent and remarkable men he had ever met, and that he desired the honour of his better acquaintance. He moreover observed that there were many little characteristics about his friend Slyme, of which he could by no means, as a man of strict honour, approve; but that he was prepared to forgive him all these slight drawbacks, and much more, in consideration of the great pleasure he himself had that day enjoyed in his social intercourse with Mr Pecksniff, which had given him a far higher and more enduring delight than the successful negotiation of any small loan on the part of his friend could possibly have imparted. With which remarks he would beg leave, he said, to wish Mr Pecksniff a very good evening. And so he took himself off; as little abashed by his recent failure as any gentleman would desire to be.

The meditations of Mr Pecksniff that evening at the bar of the Dragon, and that night in his own house, were very serious and grave indeed; the more especially as the intelligence he had received from Messrs Tigg and Slyme touching the arrival of other members of the family, were fully confirmed on more particular inquiry. For the Spottletoes had actually gone straight to the Dragon, where they were at that moment housed and mounting guard, and where their appearance had occasioned such a vast sensation that Mrs Lupin, scenting their errand before they had been under her roof half an hour, carried the news herself with all possible secrecy straight to Mr Pecksniff's house; indeed it was her great caution in doing so which occasioned her to miss that gentleman, who entered at the front door of the Dragon just as she emerged from the back one. Moreover, Mr Anthony Chuzzlewit and his son Jonas were economically quartered at the Half Moon and Seven Stars, which was an obscure ale-house; and by the very next coach there came posting to the scene of action, so many other affectionate members of the family (who quarrelled with each other, inside and out, all the way down, to the utter distraction of the coachman), that in less than four-and-twenty hours the scanty tavern accommodation was at a premium, and all the private lodgings in the place, amounting to full four beds and sofa, rose cent per cent in the market.

In a word, things came to that pass that nearly the whole family sat down before the Blue Dragon, and formally invested it; and Martin Chuzzlewit was in a state of siege. But he resisted bravely; refusing to receive all letters, messages, and parcels; obstinately declining to treat with anybody; and holding out no hope or promise of capitulation. Meantime the family forces were perpetually encountering each other in divers parts of the neighbourhood; and, as no one branch of the Chuzzlewit tree had ever been known to agree with another within the memory of man, there was such a skirmishing, and flouting, and snapping off of heads, in the metaphorical sense of that expression; such a bandying of words and calling of names; such an upturning of noses and wrinkling of brows; such a formal interment of good feelings and violent resurrection of ancient grievances; as had never been known in those quiet parts since the earliest record of their civilized existence.

At length, in utter despair and hopelessness, some few of the belligerents began to speak to each other in only moderate terms of mutual aggravation; and nearly all addressed themselves with a show of tolerable decency to Mr Pecksniff, in recognition of his high character and influential position. Thus, by little and little, they made common cause of Martin Chuzzlewit's obduracy, until

it was agreed (if such a word can be used in connection with the Chuzzlewits) that there should be a general council and conference held at Mr Pecksniff's house upon a certain day at noon; which all members of the family who had brought themselves within reach of the summons, were forthwith bidden and invited, solemnly, to attend.

If ever Mr Pecksniff wore an apostolic look, he wore it on this memorable day. If ever his unruffled smile proclaimed the words, 'I am a messenger of peace!' that was its mission now. If ever man combined within himself all the mild qualities of the lamb with a considerable touch of the dove, and not a dash of the crocodile, or the least possible suggestion of the very mildest seasoning of the serpent, that man was he. And, oh, the two Miss Pecksniffs! Oh, the serene expression on the face of Charity, which seemed to say, 'I know that all my family have injured me beyond the possibility of reparation, but I forgive them, for it is my duty so to do!' And, oh, the gay simplicity of Mercy; so charming, innocent, and infant-like, that if she had gone out walking by herself, and it had been a little earlier in the season, the robin-redbreasts might have covered her with leaves against her will, believing her to be one of the sweet children in the wood, come out of it, and issuing forth once more to look for blackberries in the young freshness of her heart! What words can paint the Pecksniffs in that trying hour? Oh, none; for words have naughty company among them, and the Pecksniffs were all goodness.

But when the company arrived! That was the time. When Mr Pecksniff, rising from his seat at the table's head, with a daughter on either hand, received his guests in the best parlour and motioned them to chairs, with eyes so overflowing and countenance so damp with gracious perspiration, that he may be said to have been in a kind of moist meekness! And the company; the jealous stony-hearted distrustful company, who were all shut up in themselves, and had no faith in anybody, and wouldn't believe anything, and would no more allow themselves to be softened or lulled asleep by the Pecksniffs than if they had been so many hedgehogs or porcupines!

First, there was Mr Spottletoe, who was so bald and had such big whiskers, that he seemed to have stopped his hair, by the sudden application of some powerful remedy, in the very act of falling off his head, and to have fastened it irrevocably on his face. Then there was Mrs Spottletoe, who being much too slim for her years, and of a poetical constitution, was accustomed to inform her more intimate friends that the said whiskers were 'the lodestar of her existence;' and who could now, by reason of her strong affection for her uncle Chuzzlewit, and the shock it gave her to be suspected of testamentary designs upon him, do nothing but cry – except moan. Then there were Anthony Chuzzlewit, and his son Jonas; the face of the old man so sharpened by the wariness and cunning of his life, that it seemed to cut him a passage through the crowded room, as he edged away behind the remotest chairs; while the son had so well profited by the precept and example of the father, that he looked a year or two the elder of the twain, as they stood winking their red eyes, side by side, and whispering to each other softly. Then there was the widow of a deceased brother of Mr Martin Chuzzlewit, who being almost supernaturally disagreeable, and having a dreary face and a bony figure and a masculine voice, was, in right of these qualities, what is commonly called a strong-minded woman; and who, if she could, would have established her claim to the title, and have shown herself, mentally speaking, a perfect Samson, by shutting up her brother-in-law in a private madhouse, until he proved his complete sanity by loving her very much. Beside her sat her spinster daughters, three in number, and of gentlemanly deportment, who had so mortified themselves with tight stays, that their tempers were reduced to something less than their waists, and sharp lacing was expressed in their very noses. Then there was a young gentleman, grandnephew of Mr Martin Chuzzlewit, very dark and very hairy, and apparently born for no particular purpose but to save looking-glasses the trouble of reflecting more than just the first idea and sketchy notion of a face, which had never been carried out. Then there was a solitary female cousin who was remarkable for nothing but being very deaf, and living by herself, and always having the toothache. Then there was George Chuzzlewit, a gay bachelor cousin, who claimed to be young but had been younger, and was inclined to corpulency,

and rather overfed himself; to that extent, indeed, that his eyes were strained in their sockets, as if with constant surprise; and he had such an obvious disposition to pimples, that the bright spots on his cravat, the rich pattern on his waistcoat, and even his glittering trinkets, seemed to have broken out upon him, and not to have come into existence comfortably. Last of all there were present Mr Chevy Slyme and his friend Tigg. And it is worthy of remark, that although each person present disliked the other, mainly because he or she *did* belong to the family, they one and all concurred in hating Mr Tigg because he didn't.

Such was the pleasant little family circle now assembled in Mr Pecksniff's best parlour, agreeably prepared to fall foul of Mr Pecksniff or anybody else who might venture to say anything whatever upon any subject.

'This,' said Mr Pecksniff, rising and looking round upon them with folded hands, 'does me good. It does my daughters good. We thank you for assembling here. We are grateful to you with our whole hearts. It is a blessed distinction that you have conferred upon us, and believe me' – it is impossible to conceive how he smiled here – 'we shall not easily forget it.'

'I am sorry to interrupt you, Pecksniff,' remarked Mr Spottletoe, with his whiskers in a very portentous state; 'but you are assuming too much to yourself, sir. Who do you imagine has it in contemplation to confer a distinction upon *you*, sir?'

A general murmur echoed this inquiry, and applauded it.

'If you are about to pursue the course with which you have begun, sir,' pursued Mr Spottletoe in a great heat, and giving a violent rap on the table with his knuckles, 'the sooner you desist, and this assembly separates, the better. I am no stranger, sir, to your preposterous desire to be regarded as the head of this family, but I can tell *you*, sir – '

Oh yes, indeed! *He* tell. *He*! What? He was the head, was he? From the strong-minded woman downwards everybody fell, that instant, upon Mr. Spottletoe, who after vainly attempting to be heard in silence was fain to sit down again, folding his arms and shaking his head most wrathfully, and giving Mrs Spottletoe to understand in dumb show, that that scoundrel Pecksniff might go on for the present, but he would cut in presently, and annihilate him.

'I am not sorry,' said Mr Pecksniff in resumption of his address, 'I am really not sorry that this little incident has happened. It is good to feel that we are met here without disguise. It is good to know that we have no reserve before each other, but are appearing freely in our own characters.'

Here, the eldest daughter of the strong-minded woman rose a little way from her seat, and trembling violently from head to foot, more as it seemed with passion than timidity, expressed a general hope that some people *would* appear in their own characters, if it were only for such a proceeding having the attraction of novelty to recommend it; and that when they (meaning the some people before mentioned) talked about their relations, they would be careful to observe who was present in company at the time; otherwise it might come round to those relations' ears, in a way they little expected; and as to red noses (she observed) she had yet to learn that a red nose was any disgrace, inasmuch as people neither made nor coloured their own noses, but had that feature provided for them without being first consulted; though even upon that branch of the subject she had great doubts whether certain noses were redder than other noses, or indeed half as red as some. This remark being received with a shrill titter by the two sisters of the speaker, Miss Charity Pecksniff begged with much politeness to be informed whether any of those very low observations were levelled at her; and receiving no more explanatory answer than was conveyed in the adage 'Those the cap fits, let them wear it,' immediately commenced a somewhat acrimonious and personal retort, wherein she was much comforted and abetted by her sister Mercy, who laughed at the same with great heartiness; indeed far more naturally than life. And it being quite impossible that any difference of opinion can take place among women without every woman who is within hearing taking active part in it, the strong-minded lady and her two daughters, and Mrs Spottletoe, and the deaf cousin (who was not at

all disqualified from joining in the dispute by reason of being perfectly unacquainted with its merits), one and all plunged into the quarrel directly.

The two Miss Pecksniffs being a pretty good match for the three Miss Chuzzlewits, and all five young ladies having, in the figurative language of the day, a great amount of steam to dispose of, the altercation would no doubt have been a long one but for the high valour and prowess of the strong-minded woman, who, in right of her reputation for powers of sarcasm, did so belabour and pummel Mrs Spottletoe with taunting words that the poor lady, before the engagement was two minutes old, had no refuge but in tears. These she shed so plentifully, and so much to the agitation and grief of Mr Spottletoe, that that gentleman, after holding his clenched fist close to Mr Pecksniff's eyes, as if it were some natural curiosity from the near inspection whereof he was likely to derive high gratification and improvement, and after offering (for no particular reason that anybody could discover) to kick Mr George Chuzzlewit for, and in consideration of, the trifling sum of sixpence, took his wife under his arm and indignantly withdrew. This diversion, by distracting the attention of the combatants, put an end to the strife, which, after breaking out afresh some twice or thrice in certain inconsiderable spurts and dashes, died away in silence.

It was then that Mr Pecksniff once more rose from his chair. It was then that the two Miss Pecksniffs composed themselves to look as if there were no such beings – not to say present, but in the whole compass of the world – as the three Miss Chuzzlewits; while the three Miss Chuzzlewits became equally unconscious of the existence of the two Miss Pecksniffs.

'It is to be lamented,' said Mr Pecksniff, with a forgiving recollection of Mr Spottletoe's fist, 'that our friend should have withdrawn himself so very hastily, though we have cause for mutual congratulation even in that, since we are assured that he is not distrustful of us in regard to anything we may say or do while he is absent. Now, that is very soothing, is it not?'

'Pecksniff,' said Anthony, who had been watching the whole party with peculiar keenness from the first – 'don't you be a hypocrite.'

'A what, my good sir?' demanded Mr Pecksniff.

'A hypocrite.'

'Charity, my dear,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'when I take my chamber candlestick to-night, remind me to be more than usually particular in praying for Mr Anthony Chuzzlewit; who has done me an injustice.'

This was said in a very bland voice, and aside, as being addressed to his daughter's private ear. With a cheerfulness of conscience, prompting almost a sprightly demeanour, he then resumed:

'All our thoughts centring in our very dear but unkind relative, and he being as it were beyond our reach, we are met to-day, really as if we were a funeral party, except – a blessed exception – that there is no body in the house.'

The strong-minded lady was not at all sure that this was a blessed exception. Quite the contrary.

'Well, my dear madam!' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Be that as it may, here we are; and being here, we are to consider whether it is possible by any justifiable means – '

'Why, you know as well as I,' said the strong-minded lady, 'that any means are justifiable in such a case, don't you?'

'Very good, my dear madam, very good; whether it is possible by *any* means, we will say by *any* means, to open the eyes of our valued relative to his present infatuation. Whether it is possible to make him acquainted by any means with the real character and purpose of that young female whose strange, whose very strange position, in reference to himself' – here Mr Pecksniff sunk his voice to an impressive whisper – 'really casts a shadow of disgrace and shame upon this family; and who, we know' – here he raised his voice again – 'else why is she his companion? harbours the very basest designs upon his weakness and his property.'

In their strong feeling on this point, they, who agreed in nothing else, all concurred as one mind. Good Heaven, that she should harbour designs upon his property! The strong-minded lady

was for poison, her three daughters were for Bridewell and bread-and-water, the cousin with the toothache advocated Botany Bay, the two Miss Pecksniffs suggested flogging. Nobody but Mr Tigg, who, notwithstanding his extreme shabbiness, was still understood to be in some sort a lady's man, in right of his upper lip and his frogs, indicated a doubt of the justifiable nature of these measures; and he only ogled the three Miss Chuzzlewits with the least admixture of banter in his admiration, as though he would observe, 'You are positively down upon her to too great an extent, my sweet creatures, upon my soul you are!'

'Now,' said Mr Pecksniff, crossing his two forefingers in a manner which was at once conciliatory and argumentative; 'I will not, upon the one hand, go so far as to say that she deserves all the inflictions which have been so very forcibly and hilariously suggested;' one of his ornamental sentences; 'nor will I, upon the other, on any account compromise my common understanding as a man, by making the assertion that she does not. What I would observe is, that I think some practical means might be devised of inducing our respected, shall I say our revered – ?'

'No!' interposed the strong-minded woman in a loud voice.

'Then I will not,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'You are quite right, my dear madam, and I appreciate and thank you for your discriminating objection – our respected relative, to dispose himself to listen to the promptings of nature, and not to the – '

'Go on, Pa!' cried Mercy.

'Why, the truth is, my dear,' said Mr Pecksniff, smiling upon his assembled kindred, 'that I am at a loss for a word. The name of those fabulous animals (pagan, I regret to say) who used to sing in the water, has quite escaped me.'

Mr George Chuzzlewit suggested 'swans.'

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Not swans. Very like swans, too. Thank you.'

The nephew with the outline of a countenance, speaking for the first and last time on that occasion, propounded 'Oysters.'

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff, with his own peculiar urbanity, 'nor oysters. But by no means unlike oysters; a very excellent idea; thank you, my dear sir, very much. Wait! Sirens. Dear me! sirens, of course. I think, I say, that means might be devised of disposing our respected relative to listen to the promptings of nature, and not to the siren-like delusions of art. Now we must not lose sight of the fact that our esteemed friend has a grandson, to whom he was, until lately, very much attached, and whom I could have wished to see here to-day, for I have a real and deep regard for him. A fine young man, a very fine young man! I would submit to you, whether we might not remove Mr Chuzzlewit's distrust of us, and vindicate our own disinterestedness by – '

'If Mr George Chuzzlewit has anything to say to *me*,' interposed the strong-minded woman, sternly, 'I beg him to speak out like a man; and not to look at me and my daughters as if he could eat us.'

'As to looking, I have heard it said, Mrs Ned,' returned Mr George, angrily, 'that a cat is free to contemplate a monarch; and therefore I hope I have some right, having been born a member of this family, to look at a person who only came into it by marriage. As to eating, I beg to say, whatever bitterness your jealousies and disappointed expectations may suggest to you, that I am not a cannibal, ma'am.'

'I don't know that!' cried the strong-minded woman.

'At all events, if I was a cannibal,' said Mr George Chuzzlewit, greatly stimulated by this retort, 'I think it would occur to me that a lady who had outlived three husbands, and suffered so very little from their loss, must be most uncommonly tough.'

The strong-minded woman immediately rose.

'And I will further add,' said Mr George, nodding his head violently at every second syllable; 'naming no names, and therefore hurting nobody but those whose consciences tell them they are alluded to, that I think it would be much more decent and becoming, if those who hooked and crooked

themselves into this family by getting on the blind side of some of its members before marriage, and manslaughtering them afterwards by crowing over them to that strong pitch that they were glad to die, would refrain from acting the part of vultures in regard to other members of this family who are living. I think it would be full as well, if not better, if those individuals would keep at home, contenting themselves with what they have got (luckily for them) already; instead of hovering about, and thrusting their fingers into, a family pie, which they flavour much more than enough, I can tell them, when they are fifty miles away.'

'I might have been prepared for this!' cried the strong-minded woman, looking about her with a disdainful smile as she moved towards the door, followed by her three daughters. 'Indeed I was fully prepared for it from the first. What else could I expect in such an atmosphere as this!'

'Don't direct your halfpay-officers' gaze at me, ma'am, if you please,' interposed Miss Charity; 'for I won't bear it.'

This was a smart stab at a pension enjoyed by the strong-minded woman, during her second widowhood and before her last coverture. It told immensely.

'I passed from the memory of a grateful country, you very miserable minx,' said Mrs Ned, 'when I entered this family; and I feel now, though I did not feel then, that it served me right, and that I lost my claim upon the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland when I so degraded myself. Now, my dears, if you're quite ready, and have sufficiently improved yourselves by taking to heart the genteel example of these two young ladies, I think we'll go. Mr Pecksniff, we are very much obliged to you, really. We came to be entertained, and you have far surpassed our utmost expectations, in the amusement you have provided for us. Thank you. Good-bye!'

With such departing words, did this strong-minded female paralyse the Pecksniffian energies; and so she swept out of the room, and out of the house, attended by her daughters, who, as with one accord, elevated their three noses in the air, and joined in a contemptuous titter. As they passed the parlour window on the outside, they were seen to counterfeit a perfect transport of delight among themselves; and with this final blow and great discouragement for those within, they vanished.

Before Mr Pecksniff or any of his remaining visitors could offer a remark, another figure passed this window, coming, at a great rate in the opposite direction; and immediately afterwards, Mr Spottletoe burst into the chamber. Compared with his present state of heat, he had gone out a man of snow or ice. His head distilled such oil upon his whiskers, that they were rich and clogged with unctuous drops; his face was violently inflamed, his limbs trembled; and he gasped and strove for breath.

'My good sir!' cried Mr Pecksniff.

'Oh yes!' returned the other; 'oh yes, certainly! Oh to be sure! Oh, of course! You hear him? You hear him? all of you!'

'What's the matter?' cried several voices.

'Oh nothing!' cried Spottletoe, still gasping. 'Nothing at all! It's of no consequence! Ask him! *He*'ll tell you!'

'I do not understand our friend,' said Mr Pecksniff, looking about him in utter amazement. 'I assure you that he is quite unintelligible to me.'

'Unintelligible, sir!' cried the other. 'Unintelligible! Do you mean to say, sir, that you don't know what has happened! That you haven't decoyed us here, and laid a plot and a plan against us! Will you venture to say that you didn't know Mr Chuzzlewit was going, sir, and that you don't know he's gone, sir?'

'Gone!' was the general cry.

'Gone,' echoed Mr Spottletoe. 'Gone while we were sitting here. Gone. Nobody knows where he's gone. Oh, of course not! Nobody knew he was going. Oh, of course not! The landlady thought up to the very last moment that they were merely going for a ride; she had no other suspicion. Oh, of course not! She's not this fellow's creature. Oh, of course not!'

Adding to these exclamations a kind of ironical howl, and gazing upon the company for one brief instant afterwards, in a sudden silence, the irritated gentleman started off again at the same tremendous pace, and was seen no more.

It was in vain for Mr Pecksniff to assure them that this new and opportune evasion of the family was at least as great a shock and surprise to him as to anybody else. Of all the bullyings and denunciations that were ever heaped on one unlucky head, none can ever have exceeded in energy and heartiness those with which he was complimented by each of his remaining relatives, singly, upon bidding him farewell.

The moral position taken by Mr Tigg was something quite tremendous; and the deaf cousin, who had the complicated aggravation of seeing all the proceedings and hearing nothing but the catastrophe, actually scraped her shoes upon the scraper, and afterwards distributed impressions of them all over the top step, in token that she shook the dust from her feet before quitting that dissembling and perfidious mansion.

Mr Pecksniff had, in short, but one comfort, and that was the knowledge that all these his relations and friends had hated him to the very utmost extent before; and that he, for his part, had not distributed among them any more love than, with his ample capital in that respect, he could comfortably afford to part with. This view of his affairs yielded him great consolation; and the fact deserves to be noted, as showing with what ease a good man may be consoled under circumstances of failure and disappointment.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONTAINING A FULL ACCOUNT OF THE INSTALLATION OF MR PECKSNIFF'S NEW PUPIL INTO THE BOSOM OF MR PECKSNIFF'S FAMILY. WITH ALL THE FESTIVITIES HELD ON THAT OCCASION, AND THE GREAT ENJOYMENT OF MR PINCH

The best of architects and land surveyors kept a horse, in whom the enemies already mentioned more than once in these pages pretended to detect a fanciful resemblance to his master. Not in his outward person, for he was a raw-boned, haggard horse, always on a much shorter allowance of corn than Mr Pecksniff; but in his moral character, wherein, said they, he was full of promise, but of no performance. He was always in a manner, going to go, and never going. When at his slowest rate of travelling he would sometimes lift up his legs so high, and display such mighty action, that it was difficult to believe he was doing less than fourteen miles an hour; and he was for ever so perfectly satisfied with his own speed, and so little disconcerted by opportunities of comparing himself with the fastest trotters, that the illusion was the more difficult of resistance. He was a kind of animal who infused into the breasts of strangers a lively sense of hope, and possessed all those who knew him better with a grim despair. In what respect, having these points of character, he might be fairly likened to his master, that good man's slanderers only can explain. But it is a melancholy truth, and a deplorable instance of the uncharitableness of the world, that they made the comparison.

In this horse, and the hooded vehicle, whatever its proper name might be, to which he was usually harnessed – it was more like a gig with a tumour than anything else – all Mr Pinch's thoughts and wishes centred, one bright frosty morning; for with this gallant equipage he was about to drive to Salisbury alone, there to meet with the new pupil, and thence to bring him home in triumph.

Blessings on thy simple heart, Tom Pinch, how proudly dost thou button up that scanty coat, called by a sad misnomer, for these many years, a 'great' one; and how thoroughly, as with thy cheerful voice thou pleasantly adjurest Sam the hostler 'not to let him go yet,' dost thou believe that quadruped desires to go, and would go if he might! Who could repress a smile – of love for thee, Tom Pinch, and not in jest at thy expense, for thou art poor enough already, Heaven knows – to think that such a holiday as lies before thee should awaken that quick flow and hurry of the spirits, in which thou settest down again, almost untasted, on the kitchen window-sill, that great white mug (put by, by thy own hands, last night, that breakfast might not hold thee late), and layest yonder crust upon the seat beside thee, to be eaten on the road, when thou art calmer in thy high rejoicing! Who, as thou drivest off, a happy, man, and noddest with a grateful lovingness to Pecksniff in his nightcap at his chamber-window, would not cry, 'Heaven speed thee, Tom, and send that thou wert going off for ever to some quiet home where thou mightst live at peace, and sorrow should not touch thee!'

What better time for driving, riding, walking, moving through the air by any means, than a fresh, frosty morning, when hope runs cheerily through the veins with the brisk blood, and tingles in the frame from head to foot! This was the glad commencement of a bracing day in early winter, such as may put the languid summer season (speaking of it when it can't be had) to the blush, and shame the spring for being sometimes cold by halves. The sheep-bells rang as clearly in the vigorous air, as if they felt its wholesome influence like living creatures; the trees, in lieu of leaves or blossoms, shed upon the ground a frosty rime that sparkled as it fell, and might have been the dust of diamonds. So it was to Tom. From cottage chimneys, smoke went streaming up high, high, as if the earth had lost its grossness, being so fair, and must not be oppressed by heavy vapour. The crust of ice on the else rippling brook was so transparent, and so thin in texture, that the lively water might of its own free will have stopped – in Tom's glad mind it had – to look upon the lovely morning. And lest the sun

should break this charm too eagerly, there moved between him and the ground, a mist like that which waits upon the moon on summer nights – the very same to Tom – and wooed him to dissolve it gently.

Tom Pinch went on; not fast, but with a sense of rapid motion, which did just as well; and as he went, all kinds of things occurred to keep him happy. Thus when he came within sight of the turnpike, and was – oh a long way off! – he saw the tollman's wife, who had that moment checked a waggon, run back into the little house again like mad, to say (she knew) that Mr Pinch was coming up. And she was right, for when he drew within hail of the gate, forth rushed the tollman's children, shrieking in tiny chorus, 'Mr Pinch!' to Tom's intense delight. The very tollman, though an ugly chap in general, and one whom folks were rather shy of handling, came out himself to take the toll, and give him rough good morning; and that with all this, and a glimpse of the family breakfast on a little round table before the fire, the crust Tom Pinch had brought away with him acquired as rich a flavour as though it had been cut from a fairy loaf.

But there was more than this. It was not only the married people and the children who gave Tom Pinch a welcome as he passed. No, no. Sparkling eyes and snowy breasts came hurriedly to many an upper casement as he clattered by, and gave him back his greeting: not stinted either, but sevenfold, good measure. They were all merry. They all laughed. And some of the wickedest among them even kissed their hands as Tom looked back. For who minded poor Mr Pinch? There was no harm in *him*.

And now the morning grew so fair, and all things were so wide awake and gay, that the sun seeming to say – Tom had no doubt he said – 'I can't stand it any longer; I must have a look,' streamed out in radiant majesty. The mist, too shy and gentle for such lusty company, fled off, quite scared, before it; and as it swept away, the hills and mounds and distant pasture lands, teeming with placid sheep and noisy crows, came out as bright as though they were unrolled bran new for the occasion. In compliment to which discovery, the brook stood still no longer, but ran briskly off to bear the tidings to the water-mill, three miles away.

Mr Pinch was jogging along, full of pleasant thoughts and cheerful influences, when he saw, upon the path before him, going in the same direction with himself, a traveller on foot, who walked with a light quick step, and sang as he went – for certain in a very loud voice, but not unmusically. He was a young fellow, of some five or six-and-twenty perhaps, and was dressed in such a free and fly-away fashion, that the long ends of his loose red neckcloth were streaming out behind him quite as often as before; and the bunch of bright winter berries in the buttonhole of his velveteen coat was as visible to Mr Pinch's rearward observation, as if he had worn that garment wrong side foremost. He continued to sing with so much energy, that he did not hear the sound of wheels until it was close behind him; when he turned a whimsical face and a very merry pair of blue eyes on Mr Pinch, and checked himself directly.

'Why, Mark?' said Tom Pinch, stopping. 'Who'd have thought of seeing you here? Well! this is surprising!'

Mark touched his hat, and said, with a very sudden decrease of vivacity, that he was going to Salisbury.

'And how spruce you are, too!' said Mr Pinch, surveying him with great pleasure. 'Really, I didn't think you were half such a tight-made fellow, Mark!'

'Thankee, Mr Pinch. Pretty well for that, I believe. It's not my fault, you know. With regard to being spruce, sir, that's where it is, you see.' And here he looked particularly gloomy.

'Where what is?' Mr Pinch demanded.

'Where the aggravation of it is. Any man may be in good spirits and good temper when he's well dressed. There an't much credit in that. If I was very ragged and very jolly, then I should begin to feel I had gained a point, Mr Pinch.'

'So you were singing just now, to bear up, as it were, against being well dressed, eh, Mark?' said Pinch.

'Your conversation's always equal to print, sir,' rejoined Mark, with a broad grin. 'That was it.'

'Well!' cried Pinch, 'you are the strangest young man, Mark, I ever knew in my life. I always thought so; but now I am quite certain of it. I am going to Salisbury, too. Will you get in? I shall be very glad of your company.'

The young fellow made his acknowledgments and accepted the offer; stepping into the carriage directly, and seating himself on the very edge of the seat with his body half out of it, to express his being there on sufferance, and by the politeness of Mr Pinch. As they went along, the conversation proceeded after this manner.

'I more than half believed, just now, seeing you so very smart,' said Pinch, 'that you must be going to be married, Mark.'

'Well, sir, I've thought of that, too,' he replied. 'There might be some credit in being jolly with a wife, 'specially if the children had the measles and that, and was very fractious indeed. But I'm a'most afraid to try it. I don't see my way clear.'

'You're not very fond of anybody, perhaps?' said Pinch.

'Not particular, sir, I think.'

'But the way would be, you know, Mark, according to your views of things,' said Mr Pinch, 'to marry somebody you didn't like, and who was very disagreeable.'

'So it would, sir; but that might be carrying out a principle a little too far, mightn't it?'

'Perhaps it might,' said Mr Pinch. At which they both laughed gayly.

'Lord bless you, sir,' said Mark, 'you don't half know me, though. I don't believe there ever was a man as could come out so strong under circumstances that would make other men miserable, as I could, if I could only get a chance. But I can't get a chance. It's my opinion that nobody never will know half of what's in me, unless something very unexpected turns up. And I don't see any prospect of that. I'm a-going to leave the Dragon, sir.'

'Going to leave the Dragon!' cried Mr Pinch, looking at him with great astonishment. 'Why, Mark, you take my breath away!'

'Yes, sir,' he rejoined, looking straight before him and a long way off, as men do sometimes when they cogitate profoundly. 'What's the use of my stopping at the Dragon? It an't at all the sort of place for *me*. When I left London (I'm a Kentish man by birth, though), and took that situation here, I quite made up my mind that it was the dullest little out-of-the-way corner in England, and that there would be some credit in being jolly under such circumstances. But, Lord, there's no dullness at the Dragon! Skittles, cricket, quoits, nine-pins, comic songs, choruses, company round the chimney corner every winter's evening. Any man could be jolly at the Dragon. There's no credit in *that*.'

'But if common report be true for once, Mark, as I think it is, being able to confirm it by what I know myself,' said Mr Pinch, 'you are the cause of half this merriment, and set it going.'

'There may be something in that, too, sir,' answered Mark. 'But that's no consolation.'

'Well!' said Mr Pinch, after a short silence, his usually subdued tone being even now more subdued than ever. 'I can hardly think enough of what you tell me. Why, what will become of Mrs Lupin, Mark?'

Mark looked more fixedly before him, and further off still, as he answered that he didn't suppose it would be much of an object to her. There were plenty of smart young fellows as would be glad of the place. He knew a dozen himself.

'That's probable enough,' said Mr Pinch, 'but I am not at all sure that Mrs Lupin would be glad of them. Why, I always supposed that Mrs Lupin and you would make a match of it, Mark; and so did every one, as far as I know.'

'I never,' Mark replied, in some confusion, 'said nothing as was in a direct way courting-like to her, nor she to me, but I don't know what I mightn't do one of these odd times, and what she mightn't say in answer. Well, sir, *that* wouldn't suit.'

'Not to be landlord of the Dragon, Mark?' cried Mr Pinch.

'No, sir, certainly not,' returned the other, withdrawing his gaze from the horizon, and looking at his fellow-traveller. 'Why that would be the ruin of a man like me. I go and sit down comfortably for life, and no man never finds me out. What would be the credit of the landlord of the Dragon's being jolly? Why, he couldn't help it, if he tried.'

'Does Mrs Lupin know you are going to leave her?' Mr Pinch inquired.

'I haven't broke it to her yet, sir, but I must. I'm looking out this morning for something new and suitable,' he said, nodding towards the city.

'What kind of thing now?' Mr Pinch demanded.

'I was thinking,' Mark replied, 'of something in the grave-digging way.'

'Good gracious, Mark?' cried Mr Pinch.

'It's a good damp, wormy sort of business, sir,' said Mark, shaking his head argumentatively, 'and there might be some credit in being jolly, with one's mind in that pursuit, unless grave-diggers is usually given that way; which would be a drawback. You don't happen to know how that is in general, do you, sir?'

'No,' said Mr Pinch, 'I don't indeed. I never thought upon the subject.'

'In case of that not turning out as well as one could wish, you know,' said Mark, musing again, 'there's other businesses. Undertaking now. That's gloomy. There might be credit to be gained there. A broker's man in a poor neighbourhood wouldn't be bad perhaps. A jailor sees a deal of misery. A doctor's man is in the very midst of murder. A bailiff's an't a lively office nat'rally. Even a tax-gatherer must find his feelings rather worked upon, at times. There's lots of trades in which I should have an opportunity, I think.'

Mr Pinch was so perfectly overwhelmed by these remarks that he could do nothing but occasionally exchange a word or two on some indifferent subject, and cast sidelong glances at the bright face of his odd friend (who seemed quite unconscious of his observation), until they reached a certain corner of the road, close upon the outskirts of the city, when Mark said he would jump down there, if he pleased.

'But bless my soul, Mark,' said Mr Pinch, who in the progress of his observation just then made the discovery that the bosom of his companion's shirt was as much exposed as if it was Midsummer, and was ruffled by every breath of air, 'why don't you wear a waistcoat?'

'What's the good of one, sir?' asked Mark.

'Good of one?' said Mr Pinch. 'Why, to keep your chest warm.'

'Lord love you, sir!' cried Mark, 'you don't know me. My chest don't want no warming. Even if it did, what would no waistcoat bring it to? Inflammation of the lungs, perhaps? Well, there'd be some credit in being jolly, with a inflammation of the lungs.'

As Mr Pinch returned no other answer than such as was conveyed in his breathing very hard, and opening his eyes very wide, and nodding his head very much, Mark thanked him for his ride, and without troubling him to stop, jumped lightly down. And away he fluttered, with his red neckerchief, and his open coat, down a cross-lane; turning back from time to time to nod to Mr Pinch, and looking one of the most careless, good-humoured comical fellows in life. His late companion, with a thoughtful face pursued his way to Salisbury.

Mr Pinch had a shrewd notion that Salisbury was a very desperate sort of place; an exceeding wild and dissipated city; and when he had put up the horse, and given the hostler to understand that he would look in again in the course of an hour or two to see him take his corn, he set forth on a stroll about the streets with a vague and not unpleasant idea that they teemed with all kinds of mystery and bedevilment. To one of his quiet habits this little delusion was greatly assisted by the circumstance of its being market-day, and the thoroughfares about the market-place being filled with carts, horses, donkeys, baskets, waggons, garden-stuff, meat, tripe, pies, poultry and huckster's wares of every opposite description and possible variety of character. Then there were young farmers and old farmers with smock-frocks, brown great-coats, drab great-coats, red worsted comforters, leather-

leggings, wonderful shaped hats, hunting-whips, and rough sticks, standing about in groups, or talking noisily together on the tavern steps, or paying and receiving huge amounts of greasy wealth, with the assistance of such bulky pocket-books that when they were in their pockets it was apoplexy to get them out, and when they were out it was spasms to get them in again. Also there were farmers' wives in beaver bonnets and red cloaks, riding shaggy horses purged of all earthly passions, who went soberly into all manner of places without desiring to know why, and who, if required, would have stood stock still in a china shop, with a complete dinner-service at each hoof. Also a great many dogs, who were strongly interested in the state of the market and the bargains of their masters; and a great confusion of tongues, both brute and human.

Mr Pinch regarded everything exposed for sale with great delight, and was particularly struck by the itinerant cutlery, which he considered of the very keenest kind, insomuch that he purchased a pocket knife with seven blades in it, and not a cut (as he afterwards found out) among them. When he had exhausted the market-place, and watched the farmers safe into the market dinner, he went back to look after the horse. Having seen him eat unto his heart's content he issued forth again, to wander round the town and regale himself with the shop windows; previously taking a long stare at the bank, and wondering in what direction underground the caverns might be where they kept the money; and turning to look back at one or two young men who passed him, whom he knew to be articled to solicitors in the town; and who had a sort of fearful interest in his eyes, as jolly dogs who knew a thing or two, and kept it up tremendously.

But the shops. First of all there were the jewellers' shops, with all the treasures of the earth displayed therein, and such large silver watches hanging up in every pane of glass, that if they were anything but first-rate goers it certainly was not because the works could decently complain of want of room. In good sooth they were big enough, and perhaps, as the saying is, ugly enough, to be the most correct of all mechanical performers; in Mr Pinch's eyes, however they were smaller than Geneva ware; and when he saw one very bloated watch announced as a repeater, gifted with the uncommon power of striking every quarter of an hour inside the pocket of its happy owner, he almost wished that he were rich enough to buy it.

But what were even gold and silver, precious stones and clockwork, to the bookshops, whence a pleasant smell of paper freshly pressed came issuing forth, awakening instant recollections of some new grammar had at school, long time ago, with 'Master Pinch, Grove House Academy,' inscribed in faultless writing on the fly-leaf! That whiff of russia leather, too, and all those rows on rows of volumes neatly ranged within – what happiness did they suggest! And in the window were the spick-and-span new works from London, with the title-pages, and sometimes even the first page of the first chapter, laid wide open; tempting unwary men to begin to read the book, and then, in the impossibility of turning over, to rush blindly in, and buy it! Here too were the dainty frontispiece and trim vignette, pointing like handposts on the outskirts of great cities, to the rich stock of incident beyond; and store of books, with many a grave portrait and time-honoured name, whose matter he knew well, and would have given mines to have, in any form, upon the narrow shell beside his bed at Mr Pecksniff's. What a heart-breaking shop it was!

There was another; not quite so bad at first, but still a trying shop; where children's books were sold, and where poor Robinson Crusoe stood alone in his might, with dog and hatchet, goat-skin cap and fowling-pieces; calmly surveying Philip Quarn and the host of imitators round him, and calling Mr Pinch to witness that he, of all the crowd, impressed one solitary footprint on the shore of boyish memory, whereof the tread of generations should not stir the lightest grain of sand. And there too were the Persian tales, with flying chests and students of enchanted books shut up for years in caverns; and there too was Abudah, the merchant, with the terrible little old woman hobbling out of the box in his bedroom; and there the mighty talisman, the rare Arabian Nights, with Cassim Baba, divided by four, like the ghost of a dreadful sum, hanging up, all gory, in the robbers' cave. Which matchless wonders, coming fast on Mr Pinch's mind, did so rub up and chafe that wonderful lamp within him,

that when he turned his face towards the busy street, a crowd of phantoms waited on his pleasure, and he lived again, with new delight, the happy days before the Pecksniff era.

He had less interest now in the chemists' shops, with their great glowing bottles (with smaller repositories of brightness in their very stoppers); and in their agreeable compromises between medicine and perfumery, in the shape of toothsome lozenges and virgin honey. Neither had he the least regard (but he never had much) for the tailors', where the newest metropolitan waistcoat patterns were hanging up, which by some strange transformation always looked amazing there, and never appeared at all like the same thing anywhere else. But he stopped to read the playbill at the theatre and surveyed the doorway with a kind of awe, which was not diminished when a sallow gentleman with long dark hair came out, and told a boy to run home to his lodgings and bring down his broadsword. Mr Pinch stood rooted to the spot on hearing this, and might have stood there until dark, but that the old cathedral bell began to ring for vesper service, on which he tore himself away.

Now, the organist's assistant was a friend of Mr Pinch's, which was a good thing, for he too was a very quiet gentle soul, and had been, like Tom, a kind of old-fashioned boy at school, though well liked by the noisy fellow too. As good luck would have it (Tom always said he had great good luck) the assistant chanced that very afternoon to be on duty by himself, with no one in the dusty organ loft but Tom; so while he played, Tom helped him with the stops; and finally, the service being just over, Tom took the organ himself. It was then turning dark, and the yellow light that streamed in through the ancient windows in the choir was mingled with a murky red. As the grand tones resounded through the church, they seemed, to Tom, to find an echo in the depth of every ancient tomb, no less than in the deep mystery of his own heart. Great thoughts and hopes came crowding on his mind as the rich music rolled upon the air and yet among them – something more grave and solemn in their purpose, but the same – were all the images of that day, down to its very lightest recollection of childhood. The feeling that the sounds awakened, in the moment of their existence, seemed to include his whole life and being; and as the surrounding realities of stone and wood and glass grew dimmer in the darkness, these visions grew so much the brighter that Tom might have forgotten the new pupil and the expectant master, and have sat there pouring out his grateful heart till midnight, but for a very earthy old verger insisting on locking up the cathedral forthwith. So he took leave of his friend, with many thanks, groped his way out, as well as he could, into the now lamp-lighted streets, and hurried off to get his dinner.

All the farmers being by this time jogging homewards, there was nobody in the sanded parlour of the tavern where he had left the horse; so he had his little table drawn out close before the fire, and fell to work upon a well-cooked steak and smoking hot potatoes, with a strong appreciation of their excellence, and a very keen sense of enjoyment. Beside him, too, there stood a jug of most stupendous Wiltshire beer; and the effect of the whole was so transcendent, that he was obliged every now and then to lay down his knife and fork, rub his hands, and think about it. By the time the cheese and celery came, Mr Pinch had taken a book out of his pocket, and could afford to trifle with the viands; now eating a little, now drinking a little, now reading a little, and now stopping to wonder what sort of a young man the new pupil would turn out to be. He had passed from this latter theme and was deep in his book again, when the door opened, and another guest came in, bringing with him such a quantity of cold air, that he positively seemed at first to put the fire out.

'Very hard frost to-night, sir,' said the newcomer, courteously acknowledging Mr Pinch's withdrawal of the little table, that he might have place: 'Don't disturb yourself, I beg.'

Though he said this with a vast amount of consideration for Mr Pinch's comfort, he dragged one of the great leather-bottomed chairs to the very centre of the hearth, notwithstanding; and sat down in front of the fire, with a foot on each hob.

'My feet are quite numbed. Ah! Bitter cold to be sure.'

'You have been in the air some considerable time, I dare say?' said Mr Pinch.

'All day. Outside a coach, too.'

‘That accounts for his making the room so cool,’ thought Mr Pinch. ‘Poor fellow! How thoroughly chilled he must be!’

The stranger became thoughtful likewise, and sat for five or ten minutes looking at the fire in silence. At length he rose and divested himself of his shawl and great-coat, which (far different from Mr Pinch’s) was a very warm and thick one; but he was not a whit more conversational out of his great-coat than in it, for he sat down again in the same place and attitude, and leaning back in his chair, began to bite his nails. He was young – one-and-twenty, perhaps – and handsome; with a keen dark eye, and a quickness of look and manner which made Tom sensible of a great contrast in his own bearing, and caused him to feel even more shy than usual.

There was a clock in the room, which the stranger often turned to look at. Tom made frequent reference to it also; partly from a nervous sympathy with its taciturn companion; and partly because the new pupil was to inquire for him at half after six, and the hands were getting on towards that hour. Whenever the stranger caught him looking at this clock, a kind of confusion came upon Tom as if he had been found out in something; and it was a perception of his uneasiness which caused the younger man to say, perhaps, with a smile:

‘We both appear to be rather particular about the time. The fact is, I have an engagement to meet a gentleman here.’

‘So have I,’ said Mr Pinch.

‘At half-past six,’ said the stranger.

‘At half-past six,’ said Tom in the very same breath; whereupon the other looked at him with some surprise.

‘The young gentleman, I expect,’ remarked Tom, timidly, ‘was to inquire at that time for a person by the name of Pinch.’

‘Dear me!’ cried the other, jumping up. ‘And I have been keeping the fire from you all this while! I had no idea you were Mr Pinch. I am the Mr Martin for whom you were to inquire. Pray excuse me. How do you do? Oh, do draw nearer, pray!’

‘Thank you,’ said Tom, ‘thank you. I am not at all cold, and you are; and we have a cold ride before us. Well, if you wish it, I will. I – I am very glad,’ said Tom, smiling with an embarrassed frankness peculiarly his, and which was as plainly a confession of his own imperfections, and an appeal to the kindness of the person he addressed, as if he had drawn one up in simple language and committed it to paper: ‘I am very glad indeed that you turn out to be the party I expected. I was thinking, but a minute ago, that I could wish him to be like you.’

‘I am very glad to hear it,’ returned Martin, shaking hands with him again; ‘for I assure you, I was thinking there could be no such luck as Mr Pinch’s turning out like you.’

‘No, really!’ said Tom, with great pleasure. ‘Are you serious?’

‘Upon my word I am,’ replied his new acquaintance. ‘You and I will get on excellently well, I know; which it’s no small relief to me to feel, for to tell you the truth, I am not at all the sort of fellow who could get on with everybody, and that’s the point on which I had the greatest doubts. But they’re quite relieved now. – Do me the favour to ring the bell, will you?’

Mr Pinch rose, and complied with great alacrity – the handle hung just over Martin’s head, as he warmed himself – and listened with a smiling face to what his friend went on to say. It was:

‘If you like punch, you’ll allow me to order a glass apiece, as hot as it can be made, that we may usher in our friendship in a becoming manner. To let you into a secret, Mr Pinch, I never was so much in want of something warm and cheering in my life; but I didn’t like to run the chance of being found drinking it, without knowing what kind of person you were; for first impressions, you know, often go a long way, and last a long time.’

Mr Pinch assented, and the punch was ordered. In due course it came; hot and strong. After drinking to each other in the steaming mixture, they became quite confidential.

‘I’m a sort of relation of Pecksniff’s, you know,’ said the young man.

'Indeed!' cried Mr Pinch.

'Yes. My grandfather is his cousin, so he's kith and kin to me, somehow, if you can make that out. I can't.'

'Then Martin is your Christian name?' said Mr Pinch, thoughtfully. 'Oh!'

'Of course it is,' returned his friend: 'I wish it was my surname for my own is not a very pretty one, and it takes a long time to sign. Chuzzlewit is my name.'

'Dear me!' cried Mr Pinch, with an involuntary start.

'You're not surprised at my having two names, I suppose?' returned the other, setting his glass to his lips. 'Most people have.'

'Oh, no,' said Mr Pinch, 'not at all. Oh dear no! Well!' And then remembering that Mr Pecksniff had privately cautioned him to say nothing in reference to the old gentleman of the same name who had lodged at the Dragon, but to reserve all mention of that person for him, he had no better means of hiding his confusion than by raising his own glass to his mouth. They looked at each other out of their respective tumblers for a few seconds, and then put them down empty.

'I told them in the stable to be ready for us ten minutes ago,' said Mr Pinch, glancing at the clock again. 'Shall we go?'

'If you please,' returned the other.

'Would you like to drive?' said Mr Pinch; his whole face beaming with a consciousness of the splendour of his offer. 'You shall, if you wish.'

'Why, that depends, Mr Pinch,' said Martin, laughing, 'upon what sort of a horse you have. Because if he's a bad one, I would rather keep my hands warm by holding them comfortably in my greatcoat pockets.'

He appeared to think this such a good joke, that Mr Pinch was quite sure it must be a capital one. Accordingly, he laughed too, and was fully persuaded that he enjoyed it very much. Then he settled his bill, and Mr Chuzzlewit paid for the punch; and having wrapped themselves up, to the extent of their respective means, they went out together to the front door, where Mr Pecksniff's property stopped the way.

'I won't drive, thank you, Mr Pinch,' said Martin, getting into the sitter's place. 'By the bye, there's a box of mine. Can we manage to take it?'

'Oh, certainly,' said Tom. 'Put it in, Dick, anywhere!'

It was not precisely of that convenient size which would admit of its being squeezed into any odd corner, but Dick the hostler got it in somehow, and Mr Chuzzlewit helped him. It was all on Mr Pinch's side, and Mr Chuzzlewit said he was very much afraid it would encumber him; to which Tom said, 'Not at all;' though it forced him into such an awkward position, that he had much ado to see anything but his own knees. But it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good; and the wisdom of the saying was verified in this instance; for the cold air came from Mr Pinch's side of the carriage, and by interposing a perfect wall of box and man between it and the new pupil, he shielded that young gentleman effectually; which was a great comfort.

It was a clear evening, with a bright moon. The whole landscape was silvered by its light and by the hoar-frost; and everything looked exquisitely beautiful. At first, the great serenity and peace through which they travelled, disposed them both to silence; but in a very short time the punch within them and the healthful air without, made them loquacious, and they talked incessantly. When they were halfway home, and stopped to give the horse some water, Martin (who was very generous with his money) ordered another glass of punch, which they drank between them, and which had not the effect of making them less conversational than before. Their principal topic of discourse was naturally Mr Pecksniff and his family; of whom, and of the great obligations they had heaped upon him, Tom Pinch, with the tears standing in his eyes, drew such a picture as would have inclined any one of common feeling almost to revere them; and of which Mr Pecksniff had not the slightest foresight

or preconceived idea, or he certainly (being very humble) would not have sent Tom Pinch to bring the pupil home.

In this way they went on, and on, and on – in the language of the story-books – until at last the village lights appeared before them, and the church spire cast a long reflection on the graveyard grass; as if it were a dial (alas, the truest in the world!) marking, whatever light shone out of Heaven, the flight of days and weeks and years, by some new shadow on that solemn ground.

'A pretty church!' said Martin, observing that his companion slackened the slack pace of the horse, as they approached.

'Is it not?' cried Tom, with great pride. 'There's the sweetest little organ there you ever heard. I play it for them.'

'Indeed?' said Martin. 'It is hardly worth the trouble, I should think. What do you get for that, now?'

'Nothing,' answered Tom.

'Well,' returned his friend, 'you *are* a very strange fellow!'

To which remark there succeeded a brief silence.

'When I say nothing,' observed Mr Pinch, cheerfully, 'I am wrong, and don't say what I mean, because I get a great deal of pleasure from it, and the means of passing some of the happiest hours I know. It led to something else the other day; but you will not care to hear about that I dare say?'

'Oh yes I shall. What?'

'It led to my seeing,' said Tom, in a lower voice, 'one of the loveliest and most beautiful faces you can possibly picture to yourself.'

'And yet I am able to picture a beautiful one,' said his friend, thoughtfully, 'or should be, if I have any memory.'

'She came' said Tom, laying his hand upon the other's arm, 'for the first time very early in the morning, when it was hardly light; and when I saw her, over my shoulder, standing just within the porch, I turned quite cold, almost believing her to be a spirit. A moment's reflection got the better of that, of course, and fortunately it came to my relief so soon, that I didn't leave off playing.'

'Why fortunately?'

'Why? Because she stood there, listening. I had my spectacles on, and saw her through the chinks in the curtains as plainly as I see you; and she was beautiful. After a while she glided off, and I continued to play until she was out of hearing.'

'Why did you do that?'

'Don't you see?' responded Tom. 'Because she might suppose I hadn't seen her; and might return.'

'And did she?'

'Certainly she did. Next morning, and next evening too; but always when there were no people about, and always alone. I rose earlier and sat there later, that when she came, she might find the church door open, and the organ playing, and might not be disappointed. She strolled that way for some days, and always stayed to listen. But she is gone now, and of all unlikely things in this wide world, it is perhaps the most improbable that I shall ever look upon her face again.'

'You don't know anything more about her?'

'No.'

'And you never followed her when she went away?'

'Why should I distress her by doing that?' said Tom Pinch. 'Is it likely that she wanted my company? She came to hear the organ, not to see me; and would you have had me scare her from a place she seemed to grow quite fond of? Now, Heaven bless her!' cried Tom, 'to have given her but a minute's pleasure every day, I would have gone on playing the organ at those times until I was an old man; quite contented if she sometimes thought of a poor fellow like me, as a part of the music; and more than recompensed if she ever mixed me up with anything she liked as well as she liked that!'

The new pupil was clearly very much amazed by Mr Pinch's weakness, and would probably have told him so, and given him some good advice, but for their opportune arrival at Mr Pecksniff's door; the front door this time, on account of the occasion being one of ceremony and rejoicing. The same man was in waiting for the horse who had been adjured by Mr Pinch in the morning not to yield to his rabid desire to start; and after delivering the animal into his charge, and beseeching Mr Chuzzlewit in a whisper never to reveal a syllable of what he had just told him in the fullness of his heart, Tom led the pupil in, for instant presentation.

Mr Pecksniff had clearly not expected them for hours to come; for he was surrounded by open books, and was glancing from volume to volume, with a black lead-pencil in his mouth, and a pair of compasses in his hand, at a vast number of mathematical diagrams, of such extraordinary shapes that they looked like designs for fireworks. Neither had Miss Charity expected them, for she was busied, with a capacious wicker basket before her, in making impracticable nightcaps for the poor. Neither had Miss Mercy expected them, for she was sitting upon her stool, tying on the – oh good gracious! – the petticoat of a large doll that she was dressing for a neighbour's child – really, quite a grown-up doll, which made it more confusing – and had its little bonnet dangling by the ribbon from one of her fair curls, to which she had fastened it lest it should be lost or sat upon. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to conceive a family so thoroughly taken by surprise as the Pecksniffs were, on this occasion.

Bless my life!' said Mr Pecksniff, looking up, and gradually exchanging his abstracted face for one of joyful recognition. 'Here already! Martin, my dear boy, I am delighted to welcome you to my poor house!'

With this kind greeting, Mr Pecksniff fairly took him to his arms, and patted him several times upon the back with his right hand the while, as if to express that his feelings during the embrace were too much for utterance.

'But here,' he said, recovering, 'are my daughters, Martin; my two only children, whom (if you ever saw them) you have not beheld – ah, these sad family divisions! – since you were infants together. Nay, my dears, why blush at being detected in your everyday pursuits? We had prepared to give you the reception of a visitor, Martin, in our little room of state,' said Mr Pecksniff, smiling, 'but I like this better, I like this better!'

Oh blessed star of Innocence, wherever you may be, how did you glitter in your home of ether, when the two Miss Pecksniffs put forth each her lily hand, and gave the same, with mantling cheeks, to Martin! How did you twinkle, as if fluttering with sympathy, when Mercy, reminded of the bonnet in her hair, hid her fair face and turned her head aside; the while her gentle sister plucked it out, and smote her with a sister's soft reproof, upon her buxom shoulder!

'And how,' said Mr Pecksniff, turning round after the contemplation of these passages, and taking Mr Pinch in a friendly manner by the elbow, 'how has our friend used you, Martin?'

'Very well indeed, sir. We are on the best terms, I assure you.'

'Old Tom Pinch!' said Mr Pecksniff, looking on him with affectionate sadness. 'Ah! It seems but yesterday that Thomas was a boy fresh from a scholastic course. Yet years have passed, I think, since Thomas Pinch and I first walked the world together!'

Mr Pinch could say nothing. He was too much moved. But he pressed his master's hand, and tried to thank him.

'And Thomas Pinch and I,' said Mr Pecksniff, in a deeper voice, 'will walk it yet, in mutual faithfulness and friendship! And if it comes to pass that either of us be run over in any of those busy crossings which divide the streets of life, the other will convey him to the hospital in Hope, and sit beside his bed in Bounty!'

'Well, well, well!' he added in a happier tone, as he shook Mr Pinch's elbow hard. 'No more of this! Martin, my dear friend, that you may be at home within these walls, let me show you how we live, and where. Come!'

With that he took up a lighted candle, and, attended by his young relative, prepared to leave the room. At the door, he stopped.

'You'll bear us company, Tom Pinch?'

Aye, cheerfully, though it had been to death, would Tom have followed him; glad to lay down his life for such a man!

'This,' said Mr Pecksniff, opening the door of an opposite parlour, 'is the little room of state, I mentioned to you. My girls have pride in it, Martin! This,' opening another door, 'is the little chamber in which my works (slight things at best) have been concocted. Portrait of myself by Spiller. Bust by Spoker. The latter is considered a good likeness. I seem to recognize something about the left-hand corner of the nose, myself.'

Martin thought it was very like, but scarcely intellectual enough. Mr Pecksniff observed that the same fault had been found with it before. It was remarkable it should have struck his young relation too. He was glad to see he had an eye for art.

'Various books you observe,' said Mr Pecksniff, waving his hand towards the wall, 'connected with our pursuit. I have scribbled myself, but have not yet published. Be careful how you come upstairs. This,' opening another door, 'is my chamber. I read here when the family suppose I have retired to rest. Sometimes I injure my health rather more than I can quite justify to myself, by doing so; but art is long and time is short. Every facility you see for jotting down crude notions, even here.'

These latter words were explained by his pointing to a small round table on which were a lamp, divers sheets of paper, a piece of India rubber, and a case of instruments; all put ready, in case an architectural idea should come into Mr Pecksniff's head in the night; in which event he would instantly leap out of bed, and fix it for ever.

Mr Pecksniff opened another door on the same floor, and shut it again, all at once, as if it were a Blue Chamber. But before he had well done so, he looked smilingly round, and said, 'Why not?'

Martin couldn't say why not, because he didn't know anything at all about it. So Mr Pecksniff answered himself, by throwing open the door, and saying:

'My daughters' room. A poor first-floor to us, but a bower to them. Very neat. Very airy. Plants you observe; hyacinths; books again; birds.' These birds, by the bye, comprised, in all, one staggering old sparrow without a tail, which had been borrowed expressly from the kitchen. 'Such trifles as girls love are here. Nothing more. Those who seek heartless splendour, would seek here in vain.'

With that he led them to the floor above.

'This,' said Mr Pecksniff, throwing wide the door of the memorable two-pair front; 'is a room where some talent has been developed I believe. This is a room in which an idea for a steeple occurred to me that I may one day give to the world. We work here, my dear Martin. Some architects have been bred in this room; a few, I think, Mr Pinch?'

Tom fully assented; and, what is more, fully believed it.

'You see,' said Mr Pecksniff, passing the candle rapidly from roll to roll of paper, 'some traces of our doings here. Salisbury Cathedral from the north. From the south. From the east. From the west. From the south-east. From the nor'west. A bridge. An almshouse. A jail. A church. A powder-magazine. A wine-cellar. A portico. A summer-house. An ice-house. Plans, elevations, sections, every kind of thing. And this,' he added, having by this time reached another large chamber on the same story, with four little beds in it, 'this is your room, of which Mr Pinch here is the quiet sharer. A southern aspect; a charming prospect; Mr Pinch's little library, you perceive; everything agreeable and appropriate. If there is any additional comfort you would desire to have here at anytime, pray mention it. Even to strangers, far less to you, my dear Martin, there is no restriction on that point.'

It was undoubtedly true, and may be stated in corroboration of Mr Pecksniff, that any pupil had the most liberal permission to mention anything in this way that suggested itself to his fancy. Some young gentlemen had gone on mentioning the very same thing for five years without ever being stopped.

'The domestic assistants,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'sleep above; and that is all.' After which, and listening complacently as he went, to the encomiums passed by his young friend on the arrangements generally, he led the way to the parlour again.

Here a great change had taken place; for festive preparations on a rather extensive scale were already completed, and the two Miss Pecksniffs were awaiting their return with hospitable looks. There were two bottles of currant wine, white and red; a dish of sandwiches (very long and very slim); another of apples; another of captain's biscuits (which are always a moist and jovial sort of viand); a plate of oranges cut up small and gritty; with powdered sugar, and a highly geological home-made cake. The magnitude of these preparations quite took away Tom Pinch's breath; for though the new pupils were usually let down softly, as one may say, particularly in the wine department, which had so many stages of declension, that sometimes a young gentleman was a whole fortnight in getting to the pump; still this was a banquet; a sort of Lord Mayor's feast in private life; a something to think of, and hold on by, afterwards.

To this entertainment, which apart from its own intrinsic merits, had the additional choice quality, that it was in strict keeping with the night, being both light and cool, Mr Pecksniff besought the company to do full justice.

'Martin,' he said, 'will seat himself between you two, my dears, and Mr Pinch will come by me. Let us drink to our new inmate, and may we be happy together! Martin, my dear friend, my love to you! Mr Pinch, if you spare the bottle we shall quarrel.'

And trying (in his regard for the feelings of the rest) to look as if the wine were not acid and didn't make him wink, Mr Pecksniff did honour to his own toast.

'This,' he said, in allusion to the party, not the wine, 'is a mingling that repays one for much disappointment and vexation. Let us be merry.' Here he took a captain's biscuit. 'It is a poor heart that never rejoices; and our hearts are not poor. No!'

With such stimulants to merriment did he beguile the time, and do the honours of the table; while Mr Pinch, perhaps to assure himself that what he saw and heard was holiday reality, and not a charming dream, ate of everything, and in particular disposed of the slim sandwiches to a surprising extent. Nor was he stinted in his draughts of wine; but on the contrary, remembering Mr Pecksniff's speech, attacked the bottle with such vigour, that every time he filled his glass anew, Miss Charity, despite her amiable resolves, could not repress a fixed and stony glare, as if her eyes had rested on a ghost. Mr Pecksniff also became thoughtful at those moments, not to say dejected; but as he knew the vintage, it is very likely he may have been speculating on the probable condition of Mr Pinch upon the morrow, and discussing within himself the best remedies for colic.

Martin and the young ladies were excellent friends already, and compared recollections of their childish days, to their mutual liveliness and entertainment. Miss Mercy laughed immensely at everything that was said; and sometimes, after glancing at the happy face of Mr Pinch, was seized with such fits of mirth as brought her to the very confines of hysterics. But for these bursts of gaiety, her sister, in her better sense, reproved her; observing, in an angry whisper, that it was far from being a theme for jest; and that she had no patience with the creature; though it generally ended in her laughing too – but much more moderately – and saying that indeed it was a little too ridiculous and intolerable to be serious about.

At length it became high time to remember the first clause of that great discovery made by the ancient philosopher, for securing health, riches, and wisdom; the infallibility of which has been for generations verified by the enormous fortunes constantly amassed by chimney-sweepers and other persons who get up early and go to bed betimes. The young ladies accordingly rose, and having taken leave of Mr Chuzzlewit with much sweetness, and of their father with much duty and of Mr Pinch with much condescension, retired to their bower. Mr Pecksniff insisted on accompanying his young friend upstairs for personal superintendence of his comforts; and taking him by the arm, conducted him once more to his bedroom, followed by Mr Pinch, who bore the light.

'Mr Pinch,' said Pecksniff, seating himself with folded arms on one of the spare beds. 'I don't see any snuffers in that candlestick. Will you oblige me by going down, and asking for a pair?'

Mr Pinch, only too happy to be useful, went off directly.

'You will excuse Thomas Pinch's want of polish, Martin,' said Mr Pecksniff, with a smile of patronage and pity, as soon as he had left the room. 'He means well.'

'He is a very good fellow, sir.'

'Oh, yes,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Yes. Thomas Pinch means well. He is very grateful. I have never regretted having befriended Thomas Pinch.'

'I should think you never would, sir.'

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'No. I hope not. Poor fellow, he is always disposed to do his best; but he is not gifted. You will make him useful to you, Martin, if you please. If Thomas has a fault, it is that he is sometimes a little apt to forget his position. But that is soon checked. Worthy soul! You will find him easy to manage. Good night!'

'Good night, sir.'

By this time Mr Pinch had returned with the snuffers.

'And good night to *you*, Mr Pinch,' said Pecksniff. 'And sound sleep to you both. Bless you! Bless you!'

Invoking this benediction on the heads of his young friends with great fervour, he withdrew to his own room; while they, being tired, soon fell asleep. If Martin dreamed at all, some clue to the matter of his visions may possibly be gathered from the after-pages of this history. Those of Thomas Pinch were all of holidays, church organs, and seraphic Pecksniffs. It was some time before Mr Pecksniff dreamed at all, or even sought his pillow, as he sat for full two hours before the fire in his own chamber, looking at the coals and thinking deeply. But he, too, slept and dreamed at last. Thus in the quiet hours of the night, one house shuts in as many incoherent and incongruous fancies as a madman's head.

CHAPTER SIX

COMPRISES, AMONG OTHER IMPORTANT MATTERS, PECKSNIFFIAN AND ARCHITECTURAL, AND EXACT RELATION OF THE PROGRESS MADE BY MR PINCH IN THE CONFIDENCE AND FRIENDSHIP OF THE NEW PUPIL

It was morning; and the beautiful Aurora, of whom so much hath been written, said, and sung, did, with her rosy fingers, nip and tweak Miss Pecksniff's nose. It was the frolicsome custom of the Goddess, in her intercourse with the fair Cherry, so to do; or in more prosaic phrase, the tip of that feature in the sweet girl's countenance was always very red at breakfast-time. For the most part, indeed, it wore, at that season of the day, a scraped and frosty look, as if it had been rasped; while a similar phenomenon developed itself in her humour, which was then observed to be of a sharp and acid quality, as though an extra lemon (figuratively speaking) had been squeezed into the nectar of her disposition, and had rather damaged its flavour.

This additional pungency on the part of the fair young creature led, on ordinary occasions, to such slight consequences as the copious dilution of Mr Pinch's tea, or to his coming off uncommonly short in respect of butter, or to other the like results. But on the morning after the Installation Banquet, she suffered him to wander to and fro among the eatables and drinkables, a perfectly free and unchecked man; so utterly to Mr Pinch's wonder and confusion, that like the wretched captive who recovered his liberty in his old age, he could make but little use of his enlargement, and fell into a strange kind of flutter for want of some kind hand to scrape his bread, and cut him off in the article of sugar with a lump, and pay him those other little attentions to which he was accustomed. There was something almost awful, too, about the self-possession of the new pupil; who 'troubled' Mr Pecksniff for the loaf, and helped himself to a rasher of that gentleman's own particular and private bacon, with all the coolness in life. He even seemed to think that he was doing quite a regular thing, and to expect that Mr Pinch would follow his example, since he took occasion to observe of that young man 'that he didn't get on'; a speech of so tremendous a character, that Tom cast down his eyes involuntarily, and felt as if he himself had committed some horrible deed and heinous breach of Mr Pecksniff's confidence. Indeed, the agony of having such an indiscreet remark addressed to him before the assembled family, was breakfast enough in itself, and would, without any other matter of reflection, have settled Mr Pinch's business and quenched his appetite, for one meal, though he had been never so hungry.

The young ladies, however, and Mr Pecksniff likewise, remained in the very best of spirits in spite of these severe trials, though with something of a mysterious understanding among themselves. When the meal was nearly over, Mr Pecksniff smilingly explained the cause of their common satisfaction.

'It is not often,' he said, 'Martin, that my daughters and I desert our quiet home to pursue the giddy round of pleasures that revolves abroad. But we think of doing so to-day.'

'Indeed, sir!' cried the new pupil.

'Yes,' said Mr Pecksniff, tapping his left hand with a letter which he held in his right. 'I have a summons here to repair to London; on professional business, my dear Martin; strictly on professional business; and I promised my girls, long ago, that whenever that happened again, they should accompany me. We shall go forth to-night by the heavy coach – like the dove of old, my dear Martin – and it will be a week before we again deposit our olive-branches in the passage. When I say olive-branches,' observed Mr Pecksniff, in explanation, 'I mean, our unpretending luggage.'

'I hope the young ladies will enjoy their trip,' said Martin.

'Oh! that I'm sure we shall!' cried Mercy, clapping her hands. 'Good gracious, Cherry, my darling, the idea of London!'

'Ardent child!' said Mr Pecksniff, gazing on her in a dreamy way. 'And yet there is a melancholy sweetness in these youthful hopes! It is pleasant to know that they never can be realised. I remember thinking once myself, in the days of my childhood, that pickled onions grew on trees, and that every elephant was born with an impregnable castle on his back. I have not found the fact to be so; far from it; and yet those visions have comforted me under circumstances of trial. Even when I have had the anguish of discovering that I have nourished in my breast on ostrich, and not a human pupil – even in that hour of agony, they have soothed me.'

At this dread allusion to John Westlock, Mr Pinch precipitately choked in his tea; for he had that very morning received a letter from him, as Mr Pecksniff very well knew.

'You will take care, my dear Martin,' said Mr Pecksniff, resuming his former cheerfulness, 'that the house does not run away in our absence. We leave you in charge of everything. There is no mystery; all is free and open. Unlike the young man in the Eastern tale – who is described as a one-eyed almanac, if I am not mistaken, Mr Pinch? – '

'A one-eyed calender, I think, sir,' faltered Tom.

'They are pretty nearly the same thing, I believe,' said Mr Pecksniff, smiling compassionately; 'or they used to be in my time. Unlike that young man, my dear Martin, you are forbidden to enter no corner of this house; but are requested to make yourself perfectly at home in every part of it. You will be jovial, my dear Martin, and will kill the fatted calf if you please!'

There was not the least objection, doubtless, to the young man's slaughtering and appropriating to his own use any calf, fat or lean, that he might happen to find upon the premises; but as no such animal chanced at that time to be grazing on Mr Pecksniff's estate, this request must be considered rather as a polite compliment that a substantial hospitality. It was the finishing ornament of the conversation; for when he had delivered it, Mr Pecksniff rose and led the way to that hotbed of architectural genius, the two-pair front.

'Let me see,' he said, searching among the papers, 'how you can best employ yourself, Martin, while I am absent. Suppose you were to give me your idea of a monument to a Lord Mayor of London; or a tomb for a sheriff; or your notion of a cow-house to be erected in a nobleman's park. Do you know, now,' said Mr Pecksniff, folding his hands, and looking at his young relation with an air of pensive interest, 'that I should very much like to see your notion of a cow-house?'

But Martin by no means appeared to relish this suggestion.

'A pump,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'is very chaste practice. I have found that a lamp post is calculated to refine the mind and give it a classical tendency. An ornamental turnpike has a remarkable effect upon the imagination. What do you say to beginning with an ornamental turnpike?'

'Whatever Mr Pecksniff pleased,' said Martin, doubtfully.

'Stay,' said that gentleman. 'Come! as you're ambitious, and are a very neat draughtsman, you shall – ha ha! – you shall try your hand on these proposals for a grammar-school; regulating your plan, of course, by the printed particulars. Upon my word, now,' said Mr Pecksniff, merrily, 'I shall be very curious to see what you make of the grammar-school. Who knows but a young man of your taste might hit upon something, impracticable and unlikely in itself, but which I could put into shape? For it really is, my dear Martin, it really is in the finishing touches alone, that great experience and long study in these matters tell. Ha, ha, ha! Now it really will be,' continued Mr Pecksniff, clapping his young friend on the back in his droll humour, 'an amusement to me, to see what you make of the grammar-school.'

Martin readily undertook this task, and Mr Pecksniff forthwith proceeded to entrust him with the materials necessary for its execution; dwelling meanwhile on the magical effect of a few finishing touches from the hand of a master; which, indeed, as some people said (and these were the old enemies again!) was unquestionably very surprising, and almost miraculous; as there were cases on

record in which the masterly introduction of an additional back window, or a kitchen door, or half-a-dozen steps, or even a water spout, had made the design of a pupil Mr Pecksniff's own work, and had brought substantial rewards into that gentleman's pocket. But such is the magic of genius, which changes all it handles into gold!

'When your mind requires to be refreshed by change of occupation,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'Thomas Pinch will instruct you in the art of surveying the back garden, or in ascertaining the dead level of the road between this house and the finger-post, or in any other practical and pleasing pursuit. There are a cart-load of loose bricks, and a score or two of old flower-pots, in the back yard. If you could pile them up my dear Martin, into any form which would remind me on my return say of St. Peter's at Rome, or the Mosque of St. Sophia at Constantinople, it would be at once improving to you and agreeable to my feelings. And now,' said Mr Pecksniff, in conclusion, 'to drop, for the present, our professional relations and advert to private matters, I shall be glad to talk with you in my own room, while I pack up my portmanteau.'

Martin attended him; and they remained in secret conference together for an hour or more; leaving Tom Pinch alone. When the young man returned, he was very taciturn and dull, in which state he remained all day; so that Tom, after trying him once or twice with indifferent conversation, felt a delicacy in obtruding himself upon his thoughts, and said no more.

He would not have had leisure to say much, had his new friend been ever so loquacious; for first of all Mr Pecksniff called him down to stand upon the top of his portmanteau and represent ancient statues there, until such time as it would consent to be locked; and then Miss Charity called him to come and cord her trunk; and then Miss Mercy sent for him to come and mend her box; and then he wrote the fullest possible cards for all the luggage; and then he volunteered to carry it all downstairs; and after that to see it safely carried on a couple of barrows to the old finger-post at the end of the lane; and then to mind it till the coach came up. In short, his day's work would have been a pretty heavy one for a porter, but his thorough good-will made nothing of it; and as he sat upon the luggage at last, waiting for the Pecksniffs, escorted by the new pupil, to come down the lane, his heart was light with the hope of having pleased his benefactor.

'I was almost afraid,' said Tom, taking a letter from his pocket and wiping his face, for he was hot with bustling about though it was a cold day, 'that I shouldn't have had time to write it, and that would have been a thousand pities; postage from such a distance being a serious consideration, when one's not rich. She will be glad to see my hand, poor girl, and to hear that Pecksniff is as kind as ever. I would have asked John Westlock to call and see her, and tell her all about me by word of mouth, but I was afraid he might speak against Pecksniff to her, and make her uneasy. Besides, they are particular people where she is, and it might have rendered her situation uncomfortable if she had had a visit from a young man like John. Poor Ruth!'

Tom Pinch seemed a little disposed to be melancholy for half a minute or so, but he found comfort very soon, and pursued his ruminations thus:

'I'm a nice man, I don't think, as John used to say (John was a kind, merry-hearted fellow; I wish he had liked Pecksniff better), to be feeling low, on account of the distance between us, when I ought to be thinking, instead, of my extraordinary good luck in having ever got here. I must have been born with a silver spoon in my mouth, I am sure, to have ever come across Pecksniff. And here have I fallen again into my usual good luck with the new pupil! Such an affable, generous, free fellow, as he is, I never saw. Why, we were companions directly! and he a relation of Pecksniff's too, and a clever, dashing youth who might cut his way through the world as if it were a cheese! Here he comes while the words are on my lips' said Tom; 'walking down the lane as if the lane belonged to him.'

In truth, the new pupil, not at all disconcerted by the honour of having Miss Mercy Pecksniff on his arm, or by the affectionate adieux of that young lady, approached as Mr Pinch spoke, followed by Miss Charity and Mr Pecksniff. As the coach appeared at the same moment, Tom lost no time in entreating the gentleman last mentioned, to undertake the delivery of his letter.

'Oh!' said Mr Pecksniff, glancing at the superscription. 'For your sister, Thomas. Yes, oh yes, it shall be delivered, Mr Pinch. Make your mind easy upon that score. She shall certainly have it, Mr Pinch.'

He made the promise with so much condescension and patronage, that Tom felt he had asked a great deal (this had not occurred to his mind before), and thanked him earnestly. The Miss Pecksniffs, according to a custom they had, were amused beyond description at the mention of Mr Pinch's sister. Oh the fright! The bare idea of a Miss Pinch! Good heavens!

Tom was greatly pleased to see them so merry, for he took it as a token of their favour, and good-humoured regard. Therefore he laughed too and rubbed his hands and wished them a pleasant journey and safe return, and was quite brisk. Even when the coach had rolled away with the olive-branches in the boot and the family of doves inside, he stood waving his hand and bowing; so much gratified by the unusually courteous demeanour of the young ladies, that he was quite regardless, for the moment, of Martin Chuzzlewit, who stood leaning thoughtfully against the finger-post, and who after disposing of his fair charge had hardly lifted his eyes from the ground.

The perfect silence which ensued upon the bustle and departure of the coach, together with the sharp air of the wintry afternoon, roused them both at the same time. They turned, as by mutual consent, and moved off arm-in-arm.

'How melancholy you are!' said Tom; 'what is the matter?'

'Nothing worth speaking of,' said Martin. 'Very little more than was the matter yesterday, and much more, I hope, than will be the matter to-morrow. I'm out of spirits, Pinch.'

'Well,' cried Tom, 'now do you know I am in capital spirits today, and scarcely ever felt more disposed to be good company. It was a very kind thing in your predecessor, John, to write to me, was it not?'

'Why, yes,' said Martin carelessly; 'I should have thought he would have had enough to do to enjoy himself, without thinking of you, Pinch.'

'Just what I felt to be so very likely,' Tom rejoined; 'but no, he keeps his word, and says, "My dear Pinch, I often think of you," and all sorts of kind and considerate things of that description.'

'He must be a devilish good-natured fellow,' said Martin, somewhat peevishly: 'because he can't mean that, you know.'

'I don't suppose he can, eh?' said Tom, looking wistfully in his companion's face. 'He says so to please me, you think?'

'Why, is it likely,' rejoined Martin, with greater earnestness, 'that a young man newly escaped from this kennel of a place, and fresh to all the delights of being his own master in London, can have much leisure or inclination to think favourably of anything or anybody he has left behind him here? I put it to you, Pinch, is it natural?'

After a short reflection, Mr Pinch replied, in a more subdued tone, that to be sure it was unreasonable to expect any such thing, and that he had no doubt Martin knew best.

'Of course I know best,' Martin observed.

'Yes, I feel that,' said Mr Pinch mildly. 'I said so.' And when he had made this rejoinder, they fell into a blank silence again, which lasted until they reached home; by which time it was dark.

Now, Miss Charity Pecksniff, in consideration of the inconvenience of carrying them with her in the coach, and the impossibility of preserving them by artificial means until the family's return, had set forth, in a couple of plates, the fragments of yesterday's feast. In virtue of which liberal arrangement, they had the happiness to find awaiting them in the parlour two chaotic heaps of the remains of last night's pleasure, consisting of certain filmy bits of oranges, some mummied sandwiches, various disrupted masses of the geological cake, and several entire captain's biscuits. That choice liquor in which to steep these dainties might not be wanting, the remains of the two bottles of currant wine had been poured together and corked with a curl-paper; so that every material was at hand for making quite a heavy night of it.

Martin Chuzzlewit beheld these roystering preparations with infinite contempt, and stirring the fire into a blaze (to the great destruction of Mr Pecksniff's coals), sat moodily down before it, in the most comfortable chair he could find. That he might the better squeeze himself into the small corner that was left for him, Mr Pinch took up his position on Miss Mercy Pecksniff's stool, and setting his glass down upon the hearthrug and putting his plate upon his knees, began to enjoy himself.

If Diogenes coming to life again could have rolled himself, tub and all, into Mr Pecksniff's parlour and could have seen Tom Pinch as he sat on Mercy Pecksniff's stool with his plate and glass before him he could not have faced it out, though in his surliest mood, but must have smiled good-temperedly. The perfect and entire satisfaction of Tom; his surpassing appreciation of the husky sandwiches, which crumbled in his mouth like saw-dust; the unspeakable relish with which he swallowed the thin wine by drops, and smacked his lips, as though it were so rich and generous that to lose an atom of its fruity flavour were a sin; the look with which he paused sometimes, with his glass in his hand, proposing silent toasts to himself; and the anxious shade that came upon his contented face when, after wandering round the room, exulting in its uninvaded snugness, his glance encountered the dull brow of his companion; no cynic in the world, though in his hatred of its men a very griffin, could have withstood these things in Thomas Pinch.

Some men would have slapped him on the back, and pledged him in a bumper of the currant wine, though it had been the sharpest vinegar – aye, and liked its flavour too; some would have seized him by his honest hand, and thanked him for the lesson that his simple nature taught them. Some would have laughed with, and others would have laughed at him; of which last class was Martin Chuzzlewit, who, unable to restrain himself, at last laughed loud and long.

'That's right,' said Tom, nodding approvingly. 'Cheer up! That's capital!'

At which encouragement young Martin laughed again; and said, as soon as he had breath and gravity enough:

'I never saw such a fellow as you are, Pinch.'

'Didn't you though?' said Tom. 'Well, it's very likely you do find me strange, because I have hardly seen anything of the world, and you have seen a good deal I dare say?'

'Pretty well for my time of life,' rejoined Martin, drawing his chair still nearer to the fire, and spreading his feet out on the fender. 'Deuce take it, I must talk openly to somebody. I'll talk openly to you, Pinch.'

'Do!' said Tom. 'I shall take it as being very friendly of you,'

'I'm not in your way, am I?' inquired Martin, glancing down at Mr Pinch, who was by this time looking at the fire over his leg.

'Not at all!' cried Tom.

'You must know then, to make short of a long story,' said Martin, beginning with a kind of effort, as if the revelation were not agreeable to him; 'that I have been bred up from childhood with great expectations, and have always been taught to believe that I should be, one day, very rich. So I should have been, but for certain brief reasons which I am going to tell you, and which have led to my being disinherited.'

'By your father?' inquired Mr Pinch, with open eyes.

'By my grandfather. I have had no parents these many years. Scarcely within my remembrance.'

'Neither have I,' said Tom, touching the young man's hand with his own and timidly withdrawing it again. 'Dear me!'

'Why, as to that, you know, Pinch,' pursued the other, stirring the fire again, and speaking in his rapid, off-hand way; 'it's all very right and proper to be fond of parents when we have them, and to bear them in remembrance after they're dead, if you have ever known anything of them. But as I never did know anything about mine personally, you know, why, I can't be expected to be very sentimental about 'em. And I am not; that's the truth.'

Mr Pinch was just then looking thoughtfully at the bars. But on his companion pausing in this place, he started, and said 'Oh! of course' – and composed himself to listen again.

'In a word,' said Martin, 'I have been bred and reared all my life by this grandfather of whom I have just spoken. Now, he has a great many good points – there is no doubt about that; I'll not disguise the fact from you – but he has two very great faults, which are the staple of his bad side. In the first place, he has the most confirmed obstinacy of character you ever met with in any human creature. In the second, he is most abominably selfish.'

'Is he indeed?' cried Tom.

'In those two respects,' returned the other, 'there never was such a man. I have often heard from those who know, that they have been, time out of mind, the failings of our family; and I believe there's some truth in it. But I can't say of my own knowledge. All I have to do, you know, is to be very thankful that they haven't descended to me, and, to be very careful that I don't contract 'em.'

'To be sure,' said Mr Pinch. 'Very proper.'

'Well, sir,' resumed Martin, stirring the fire once more, and drawing his chair still closer to it, 'his selfishness makes him exacting, you see; and his obstinacy makes him resolute in his exactions. The consequence is that he has always exacted a great deal from me in the way of respect, and submission, and self-denial when his wishes were in question, and so forth. I have borne a great deal from him, because I have been under obligations to him (if one can ever be said to be under obligations to one's own grandfather), and because I have been really attached to him; but we have had a great many quarrels for all that, for I could not accommodate myself to his ways very often – not out of the least reference to myself, you understand, but because – ' he stammered here, and was rather at a loss.

Mr Pinch being about the worst man in the world to help anybody out of a difficulty of this sort, said nothing.

'Well! as you understand me,' resumed Martin, quickly, 'I needn't hunt for the precise expression I want. Now I come to the cream of my story, and the occasion of my being here. I am in love, Pinch.'

Mr Pinch looked up into his face with increased interest.

'I say I am in love. I am in love with one of the most beautiful girls the sun ever shone upon. But she is wholly and entirely dependent upon the pleasure of my grandfather; and if he were to know that she favoured my passion, she would lose her home and everything she possesses in the world. There is nothing very selfish in *that* love, I think?'

'Selfish!' cried Tom. 'You have acted nobly. To love her as I am sure you do, and yet in consideration for her state of dependence, not even to disclose – '

'What are you talking about, Pinch?' said Martin pettishly: 'don't make yourself ridiculous, my good fellow! What do you mean by not disclosing?'

'I beg your pardon,' answered Tom. 'I thought you meant that, or I wouldn't have said it.'

'If I didn't tell her I loved her, where would be the use of my being in love?' said Martin: 'unless to keep myself in a perpetual state of worry and vexation?'

'That's true,' Tom answered. 'Well! I can guess what *she* said when you told her,' he added, glancing at Martin's handsome face.

'Why, not exactly, Pinch,' he rejoined, with a slight frown; 'because she has some girlish notions about duty and gratitude, and all the rest of it, which are rather hard to fathom; but in the main you are right. Her heart was mine, I found.'

'Just what I supposed,' said Tom. 'Quite natural!' and, in his great satisfaction, he took a long sip out of his wine-glass.

'Although I had conducted myself from the first with the utmost circumspection,' pursued Martin, 'I had not managed matters so well but that my grandfather, who is full of jealousy and distrust, suspected me of loving her. He said nothing to her, but straightway attacked me in private, and charged me with designing to corrupt the fidelity to himself (there you observe his selfishness), of a young creature whom he had trained and educated to be his only disinterested and faithful

companion, when he should have disposed of me in marriage to his heart's content. Upon that, I took fire immediately, and told him that with his good leave I would dispose of myself in marriage, and would rather not be knocked down by him or any other auctioneer to any bidder whomsoever.'

Mr Pinch opened his eyes wider, and looked at the fire harder than he had done yet.

'You may be sure,' said Martin, 'that this nettled him, and that he began to be the very reverse of complimentary to myself. Interview succeeded interview; words engendered words, as they always do; and the upshot of it was, that I was to renounce her, or be renounced by him. Now you must bear in mind, Pinch, that I am not only desperately fond of her (for though she is poor, her beauty and intellect would reflect great credit on anybody, I don't care of what pretensions who might become her husband), but that a chief ingredient in my composition is a most determined – '

'Obstinacy,' suggested Tom in perfect good faith. But the suggestion was not so well received as he had expected; for the young man immediately rejoined, with some irritation,

'What a fellow you are, Pinch!'

'I beg your pardon,' said Tom, 'I thought you wanted a word.'

'I didn't want that word,' he rejoined. 'I told you obstinacy was no part of my character, did I not? I was going to say, if you had given me leave, that a chief ingredient in my composition is a most determined firmness.'

'Oh!' cried Tom, screwing up his mouth, and nodding. 'Yes, yes; I see!'

'And being firm,' pursued Martin, 'of course I was not going to yield to him, or give way by so much as the thousandth part of an inch.'

'No, no,' said Tom.

'On the contrary, the more he urged, the more I was determined to oppose him.'

'To be sure!' said Tom.

'Very well,' rejoined Martin, throwing himself back in his chair, with a careless wave of both hands, as if the subject were quite settled, and nothing more could be said about it – 'There is an end of the matter, and here am I!'

Mr Pinch sat staring at the fire for some minutes with a puzzled look, such as he might have assumed if some uncommonly difficult conundrum had been proposed, which he found it impossible to guess. At length he said:

'Pecksniff, of course, you had known before?'

'Only by name. No, I had never seen him, for my grandfather kept not only himself but me, aloof from all his relations. But our separation took place in a town in the adjoining country. From that place I came to Salisbury, and there I saw Pecksniff's advertisement, which I answered, having always had some natural taste, I believe, in the matters to which it referred, and thinking it might suit me. As soon as I found it to be his, I was doubly bent on coming to him if possible, on account of his being – '

'Such an excellent man,' interposed Tom, rubbing his hands: 'so he is. You were quite right.'

'Why, not so much on that account, if the truth must be spoken,' returned Martin, 'as because my grandfather has an inveterate dislike to him, and after the old man's arbitrary treatment of me, I had a natural desire to run as directly counter to all his opinions as I could. Well! As I said before, here I am. My engagement with the young lady I have been telling you about is likely to be a tolerably long one; for neither her prospects nor mine are very bright; and of course I shall not think of marrying until I am well able to do so. It would never do, you know, for me to be plunging myself into poverty and shabbiness and love in one room up three pair of stairs, and all that sort of thing.'

'To say nothing of her,' remarked Tom Pinch, in a low voice.

'Exactly so,' rejoined Martin, rising to warm his back, and leaning against the chimney-piece. 'To say nothing of her. At the same time, of course it's not very hard upon her to be obliged to yield to the necessity of the case; first, because she loves me very much; and secondly, because I have sacrificed a great deal on her account, and might have done much better, you know.'

It was a very long time before Tom said ‘Certainly;’ so long, that he might have taken a nap in the interval, but he did say it at last.

‘Now, there is one odd coincidence connected with this love-story,’ said Martin, ‘which brings it to an end. You remember what you told me last night as we were coming here, about your pretty visitor in the church?’

‘Surely I do,’ said Tom, rising from his stool, and seating himself in the chair from which the other had lately risen, that he might see his face. ‘Undoubtedly.’

‘That was she.’

‘I knew what you were going to say,’ cried Tom, looking fixedly at him, and speaking very softly. ‘You don’t tell me so?’

‘That was she,’ repeated the young man. ‘After what I have heard from Pecksniff, I have no doubt that she came and went with my grandfather. – Don’t you drink too much of that sour wine, or you’ll have a fit of some sort, Pinch, I see.’

‘It is not very wholesome, I am afraid,’ said Tom, setting down the empty glass he had for some time held. ‘So that was she, was it?’

Martin nodded assent; and adding, with a restless impatience, that if he had been a few days earlier he would have seen her; and that now she might be, for anything he knew, hundreds of miles away; threw himself, after a few turns across the room, into a chair, and chafed like a spoilt child.

Tom Pinch’s heart was very tender, and he could not bear to see the most indifferent person in distress; still less one who had awakened an interest in him, and who regarded him (either in fact, or as he supposed) with kindness, and in a spirit of lenient construction. Whatever his own thoughts had been a few moments before – and to judge from his face they must have been pretty serious – he dismissed them instantly, and gave his young friend the best counsel and comfort that occurred to him.

‘All will be well in time,’ said Tom, ‘I have no doubt; and some trial and adversity just now will only serve to make you more attached to each other in better days. I have always read that the truth is so, and I have a feeling within me, which tells me how natural and right it is that it should be. That never ran smooth yet,’ said Tom, with a smile which, despite the homeliness of his face, was pleasanter to see than many a proud beauty’s brightest glance; ‘what never ran smooth yet, can hardly be expected to change its character for us; so we must take it as we find it, and fashion it into the very best shape we can, by patience and good-humour. I have no power at all; I needn’t tell you that; but I have an excellent will; and if I could ever be of use to you, in any way whatever, how very glad I should be!’

‘Thank you,’ said Martin, shaking his hand. ‘You’re a good fellow, upon my word, and speak very kindly. Of course you know,’ he added, after a moment’s pause, as he drew his chair towards the fire again, ‘I should not hesitate to avail myself of your services if you could help me at all; but mercy on us!’ – Here he rumpled his hair impatiently with his hand, and looked at Tom as if he took it rather ill that he was not somebody else – ‘you might as well be a toasting-fork or a frying-pan, Pinch, for any help you can render me.’

‘Except in the inclination,’ said Tom, gently.

‘Oh! to be sure. I meant that, of course. If inclination went for anything, I shouldn’t want help. I tell you what you may do, though, if you will, and at the present moment too.’

‘What is that?’ demanded Tom.

‘Read to me.’

‘I shall be delighted,’ cried Tom, catching up the candle with enthusiasm. ‘Excuse my leaving you in the dark a moment, and I’ll fetch a book directly. What will you like? Shakespeare?’

‘Aye!’ replied his friend, yawning and stretching himself. ‘He’ll do. I am tired with the bustle of to-day, and the novelty of everything about me; and in such a case, there’s no greater luxury in the world, I think, than being read to sleep. You won’t mind my going to sleep, if I can?’

‘Not at all!’ cried Tom.

‘Then begin as soon as you like. You needn’t leave off when you see me getting drowsy (unless you feel tired), for it’s pleasant to wake gradually to the sounds again. Did you ever try that?’

‘No, I never tried that,’ said Tom

‘Well! You can, you know, one of these days when we’re both in the right humour. Don’t mind leaving me in the dark. Look sharp!’

Mr Pinch lost no time in moving away; and in a minute or two returned with one of the precious volumes from the shelf beside his bed. Martin had in the meantime made himself as comfortable as circumstances would permit, by constructing before the fire a temporary sofa of three chairs with Mercy’s stool for a pillow, and lying down at full-length upon it.

‘Don’t be too loud, please,’ he said to Pinch.

‘No, no,’ said Tom.

‘You’re sure you’re not cold’

‘Not at all!’ cried Tom.

‘I am quite ready, then.’

Mr Pinch accordingly, after turning over the leaves of his book with as much care as if they were living and highly cherished creatures, made his own selection, and began to read. Before he had completed fifty lines his friend was snoring.

‘Poor fellow!’ said Tom, softly, as he stretched out his head to peep at him over the backs of the chairs. ‘He is very young to have so much trouble. How trustful and generous in him to bestow all this confidence in me. And that was she, was it?’

But suddenly remembering their compact, he took up the poem at the place where he had left off, and went on reading; always forgetting to snuff the candle, until its wick looked like a mushroom. He gradually became so much interested, that he quite forgot to replenish the fire; and was only reminded of his neglect by Martin Chuzzlewit starting up after the lapse of an hour or so, and crying with a shiver.

‘Why, it’s nearly out, I declare! No wonder I dreamed of being frozen. Do call for some coals. What a fellow you are, Pinch!’

CHAPTER SEVEN

IN WHICH MR CHEVY SLYME ASSERTS THE INDEPENDENCE OF HIS SPIRIT, AND THE BLUE DRAGON LOSES A LIMB

Martin began to work at the grammar-school next morning, with so much vigour and expedition, that Mr Pinch had new reason to do homage to the natural endowments of that young gentleman, and to acknowledge his infinite superiority to himself. The new pupil received Tom's compliments very graciously; and having by this time conceived a real regard for him, in his own peculiar way, predicted that they would always be the very best of friends, and that neither of them, he was certain (but particularly Tom), would ever have reason to regret the day on which they became acquainted. Mr Pinch was delighted to hear him say this, and felt so much flattered by his kind assurances of friendship and protection, that he was at a loss how to express the pleasure they afforded him. And indeed it may be observed of this friendship, such as it was, that it had within it more likely materials of endurance than many a sworn brotherhood that has been rich in promise; for so long as the one party found a pleasure in patronizing, and the other in being patronised (which was in the very essence of their respective characters), it was of all possible events among the least probable, that the twin demons, Envy and Pride, would ever arise between them. So in very many cases of friendship, or what passes for it, the old axiom is reversed, and like clings to unlike more than to like.

They were both very busy on the afternoon succeeding the family's departure – Martin with the grammar-school, and Tom in balancing certain receipts of rents, and deducting Mr Pecksniff's commission from the same; in which abstruse employment he was much distracted by a habit his new friend had of whistling aloud while he was drawing – when they were not a little startled by the unexpected obtrusion into that sanctuary of genius, of a human head which, although a shaggy and somewhat alarming head in appearance, smiled affably upon them from the doorway, in a manner that was at once waggish, conciliatory, and expressive of approbation.

'I am not industrious myself, gents both,' said the head, 'but I know how to appreciate that quality in others. I wish I may turn grey and ugly, if it isn't in my opinion, next to genius, one of the very charmingest qualities of the human mind. Upon my soul, I am grateful to my friend Pecksniff for helping me to the contemplation of such a delicious picture as you present. You remind me of Whittington, afterwards thrice Lord Mayor of London. I give you my unsullied word of honour, that you very strongly remind me of that historical character. You are a pair of Whittingtons, gents, without the cat; which is a most agreeable and blessed exception to me, for I am not attached to the feline species. My name is Tigg; how do you do?'

Martin looked to Mr Pinch for an explanation; and Tom, who had never in his life set eyes on Mr Tigg before, looked to that gentleman himself.

'Chevy Slyme?' said Mr Tigg, interrogatively, and kissing his left hand in token of friendship. 'You will understand me when I say that I am the accredited agent of Chevy Slyme; that I am the ambassador from the court of Chiv? Ha ha!'

'Heyday!' asked Martin, starting at the mention of a name he knew. 'Pray, what does he want with me?'

'If your name is Pinch' – Mr Tigg began.

'It is not' said Martin, checking himself. 'That is Mr Pinch.'

'If that is Mr Pinch,' cried Tigg, kissing his hand again, and beginning to follow his head into the room, 'he will permit me to say that I greatly esteem and respect his character, which has been most highly commended to me by my friend Pecksniff; and that I deeply appreciate his talent for the organ, notwithstanding that I do not, if I may use the expression, grind myself. If that is Mr Pinch,

I will venture to express a hope that I see him well, and that he is suffering no inconvenience from the easterly wind?'

'Thank you,' said Tom. 'I am very well.'

'That is a comfort,' Mr Tigg rejoined. 'Then,' he added, shielding his lips with the palm of his hand, and applying them close to Mr Pinch's ear, 'I have come for the letter.'

'For the letter,' said Tom, aloud. 'What letter?'

'The letter,' whispered Tigg in the same cautious manner as before, 'which my friend Pecksniff addressed to Chevy Slyme, Esquire, and left with you.'

'He didn't leave any letter with me,' said Tom.

'Hush!' cried the other. 'It's all the same thing, though not so delicately done by my friend Pecksniff as I could have wished. The money.'

'The money!' cried Tom quite scared.

'Exactly so,' said Mr Tigg. With which he rapped Tom twice or thrice upon the breast and nodded several times, as though he would say that he saw they understood each other; that it was unnecessary to mention the circumstance before a third person; and that he would take it as a particular favour if Tom would slip the amount into his hand, as quietly as possible.

Mr Pinch, however, was so very much astounded by this (to him) inexplicable deportment, that he at once openly declared there must be some mistake, and that he had been entrusted with no commission whatever having any reference to Mr Tigg or to his friend, either. Mr Tigg received this declaration with a grave request that Mr Pinch would have the goodness to make it again; and on Tom's repeating it in a still more emphatic and unmistakable manner, checked it off, sentence for sentence, by nodding his head solemnly at the end of each. When it had come to a close for the second time, Mr Tigg sat himself down in a chair and addressed the young men as follows:

'Then I tell you what it is, gents both. There is at this present moment in this very place, a perfect constellation of talent and genius, who is involved, through what I cannot but designate as the culpable negligence of my friend Pecksniff, in a situation as tremendous, perhaps, as the social intercourse of the nineteenth century will readily admit of. There is actually at this instant, at the Blue Dragon in this village – an ale-house, observe; a common, paltry, low-minded, clodhopping, pipe-smoking ale-house – an individual, of whom it may be said, in the language of the Poet, that nobody but himself can in any way come up to him; who is detained there for his bill. Ha! ha! For his bill. I repeat it – for his bill. Now,' said Mr Tigg, 'we have heard of Fox's Book of Martyrs, I believe, and we have heard of the Court of Requests, and the Star Chamber; but I fear the contradiction of no man alive or dead, when I assert that my friend Chevy Slyme being held in pawn for a bill, beats any amount of cockfighting with which I am acquainted.'

Martin and Mr Pinch looked, first at each other, and afterwards at Mr Tigg, who with his arms folded on his breast surveyed them, half in despondency and half in bitterness.

'Don't mistake me, gents both,' he said, stretching forth his right hand. 'If it had been for anything but a bill, I could have borne it, and could still have looked upon mankind with some feeling of respect; but when such a man as my friend Slyme is detained for a score – a thing in itself essentially mean; a low performance on a slate, or possibly chalked upon the back of a door – I do feel that there is a screw of such magnitude loose somewhere, that the whole framework of society is shaken, and the very first principles of things can no longer be trusted. In short, gents both,' said Mr Tigg with a passionate flourish of his hands and head, 'when a man like Slyme is detained for such a thing as a bill, I reject the superstitions of ages, and believe nothing. I don't even believe that I *don't* believe, curse me if I do!'

'I am very sorry, I am sure,' said Tom after a pause, 'but Mr Pecksniff said nothing to me about it, and I couldn't act without his instructions. Wouldn't it be better, sir, if you were to go to – to wherever you came from – yourself, and remit the money to your friend?'

‘How can that be done, when I am detained also?’ said Mr Tigg; ‘and when moreover, owing to the astounding, and I must add, guilty negligence of my friend Pecksniff, I have no money for coach-hire?’

Tom thought of reminding the gentleman (who, no doubt, in his agitation had forgotten it) that there was a post-office in the land; and that possibly if he wrote to some friend or agent for a remittance it might not be lost upon the road; or at all events that the chance, however desperate, was worth trusting to. But, as his good-nature presently suggested to him certain reasons for abstaining from this hint, he paused again, and then asked:

‘Did you say, sir, that you were detained also?’

‘Come here,’ said Mr Tigg, rising. ‘You have no objection to my opening this window for a moment?’

‘Certainly not,’ said Tom.

‘Very good,’ said Mr Tigg, lifting the sash. ‘You see a fellow down there in a red neckcloth and no waistcoat?’

‘Of course I do,’ cried Tom. ‘That’s Mark Tapley.’

‘Mark Tapley is it?’ said the gentleman. ‘Then Mark Tapley had not only the great politeness to follow me to this house, but is waiting now, to see me home again. And for that attention, sir,’ added Mr Tigg, stroking his moustache, ‘I can tell you, that Mark Tapley had better in his infancy have been fed to suffocation by Mrs Tapley, than preserved to this time.’

Mr Pinch was not so dismayed by this terrible threat, but that he had voice enough to call to Mark to come in, and upstairs; a summons which he so speedily obeyed, that almost as soon as Tom and Mr Tigg had drawn in their heads and closed the window again, he, the denounced, appeared before them.

‘Come here, Mark!’ said Mr Pinch. ‘Good gracious me! what’s the matter between Mrs Lupin and this gentleman?’

‘What gentleman, sir?’ said Mark. ‘I don’t see no gentleman here sir, excepting you and the new gentleman,’ to whom he made a rough kind of bow – ‘and there’s nothing wrong between Mrs Lupin and either of you, Mr Pinch, I am sure.’

‘Nonsense, Mark!’ cried Tom. ‘You see Mr – ’

‘Tigg,’ interposed that gentleman. ‘Wait a bit. I shall crush him soon. All in good time!’

‘Oh *him*!’ rejoined Mark, with an air of careless defiance. ‘Yes, I see *him*. I could see him a little better, if he’d shave himself, and get his hair cut.’

Mr Tigg shook his head with a ferocious look, and smote himself once upon the breast.

‘It’s no use,’ said Mark. ‘If you knock ever so much in that quarter, you’ll get no answer. I know better. There’s nothing there but padding; and a greasy sort it is.’

‘Nay, Mark,’ urged Mr Pinch, interposing to prevent hostilities, ‘tell me what I ask you. You’re not out of temper, I hope?’

‘Out of temper, sir!’ cried Mark, with a grin; ‘why no, sir. There’s a little credit – not much – in being jolly, when such fellows as him is a-going about like roaring lions; if there is any breed of lions, at least, as is all roar and mane. What is there between him and Mrs Lupin, sir? Why, there’s a score between him and Mrs Lupin. And I think Mrs Lupin lets him and his friend off very easy in not charging ‘em double prices for being a disgrace to the Dragon. That’s my opinion. I wouldn’t have any such Peter the Wild Boy as him in my house, sir, not if I was paid race-week prices for it. He’s enough to turn the very beer in the casks sour with his looks; he is! So he would, if it had judgment enough.’

‘You’re not answering my question, you know, Mark,’ observed Mr Pinch.

‘Well, sir,’ said Mark, ‘I don’t know as there’s much to answer further than that. Him and his friend goes and stops at the Moon and Stars till they’ve run a bill there; and then comes and stops with us and does the same. The running of bills is common enough Mr Pinch; it an’t that as we object to; it’s the ways of this chap. Nothing’s good enough for him; all the women is dying for him he thinks,

and is overpaid if he winks at 'em; and all the men was made to be ordered about by him. This not being aggravation enough, he says this morning to me, in his usual captivating way, "We're going to-night, my man." "Are you, sir?" says I. "Perhaps you'd like the bill got ready, sir?" "Oh no, my man," he says; "you needn't mind that. I'll give Pecksniff orders to see to that." In reply to which, the Dragon makes answer, "Thankee, sir, you're very kind to honour us so far, but as we don't know any particular good of you, and you don't travel with luggage, and Mr Pecksniff an't at home (which perhaps you mayn't happen to be aware of, sir), we should prefer something more satisfactory;" and that's where the matter stands. And I ask,' said Mr Tapley, pointing, in conclusion, to Mr Tigg, with his hat, 'any lady or gentleman, possessing ordinary strength of mind, to say whether he's a disagreeable-looking chap or not!'

'Let me inquire,' said Martin, interposing between this candid speech and the delivery of some blighting anathema by Mr Tigg, 'what the amount of this debt may be?'

'In point of money, sir, very little,' answered Mark. 'Only just turned of three pounds. But it an't that; it's the – '

'Yes, yes, you told us so before,' said Martin. 'Pinch, a word with you.'

'What is it?' asked Tom, retiring with him to a corner of the room.

'Why, simply – I am ashamed to say – that this Mr Slyme is a relation of mine, of whom I never heard anything pleasant; and that I don't want him here just now, and think he would be cheaply got rid of, perhaps, for three or four pounds. You haven't enough money to pay this bill, I suppose?'

Tom shook his head to an extent that left no doubt of his entire sincerity.

'That's unfortunate, for I am poor too; and in case you had had it, I'd have borrowed it of you. But if we told this landlady we would see her paid, I suppose that would answer the same purpose?'

'Oh dear, yes!' said Tom. 'She knows me, bless you!'

'Then let us go down at once and tell her so; for the sooner we are rid of their company the better. As you have conducted the conversation with this gentleman hitherto, perhaps you'll tell him what we purpose doing; will you?'

Mr Pinch, complying, at once imparted the intelligence to Mr Tigg, who shook him warmly by the hand in return, assuring him that his faith in anything and everything was again restored. It was not so much, he said, for the temporary relief of this assistance that he prized it, as for its vindication of the high principle that Nature's Nobs felt with Nature's Nobs, and that true greatness of soul sympathized with true greatness of soul, all the world over. It proved to him, he said, that like him they admired genius, even when it was coupled with the alloy occasionally visible in the metal of his friend Slyme; and on behalf of that friend, he thanked them; as warmly and heartily as if the cause were his own. Being cut short in these speeches by a general move towards the stairs, he took possession at the street door of the lapel of Mr Pinch's coat, as a security against further interruption; and entertained that gentleman with some highly improving discourse until they reached the Dragon, whither they were closely followed by Mark and the new pupil.

The rosy hostess scarcely needed Mr Pinch's word as a preliminary to the release of her two visitors, of whom she was glad to be rid on any terms; indeed, their brief detention had originated mainly with Mr Tapley, who entertained a constitutional dislike to gentleman out-at-elbows who flourished on false pretences; and had conceived a particular aversion to Mr Tigg and his friend, as choice specimens of the species. The business in hand thus easily settled, Mr Pinch and Martin would have withdrawn immediately, but for the urgent entreaties of Mr Tigg that they would allow him the honour of presenting them to his friend Slyme, which were so very difficult of resistance that, yielding partly to these persuasions and partly to their own curiosity, they suffered themselves to be ushered into the presence of that distinguished gentleman.

He was brooding over the remains of yesterday's decanter of brandy, and was engaged in the thoughtful occupation of making a chain of rings on the top of the table with the wet foot of his drinking-glass. Wretched and forlorn as he looked, Mr Slyme had once been in his way, the choicest

of swaggerers; putting forth his pretensions boldly, as a man of infinite taste and most undoubted promise. The stock-in-trade requisite to set up an amateur in this department of business is very slight, and easily got together; a trick of the nose and a curl of the lip sufficient to compound a tolerable sneer, being ample provision for any exigency. But, in an evil hour, this off-shoot of the Chuzzlewit trunk, being lazy, and ill qualified for any regular pursuit and having dissipated such means as he ever possessed, had formally established himself as a professor of Taste for a livelihood; and finding, too late, that something more than his old amount of qualifications was necessary to sustain him in this calling, had quickly fallen to his present level, where he retained nothing of his old self but his boastfulness and his bile, and seemed to have no existence separate or apart from his friend Tigg. And now so abject and so pitiful was he – at once so maudlin, insolent, beggarly, and proud – that even his friend and parasite, standing erect beside him, swelled into a Man by contrast.

'Chiv,' said Mr Tigg, clapping him on the back, 'my friend Pecksniff not being at home, I have arranged our trifling piece of business with Mr Pinch and friend. Mr Pinch and friend, Mr Chevy Slyme! Chiv, Mr Pinch and friend!'

'These are agreeable circumstances in which to be introduced to strangers,' said Chevy Slyme, turning his bloodshot eyes towards Tom Pinch. 'I am the most miserable man in the world, I believe!'

Tom begged he wouldn't mention it; and finding him in this condition, retired, after an awkward pause, followed by Martin. But Mr Tigg so urgently conjured them, by coughs and signs, to remain in the shadow of the door, that they stopped there.

'I swear,' cried Mr Slyme, giving the table an imbecile blow with his fist, and then feebly leaning his head upon his hand, while some drunken drops oozed from his eyes, 'that I am the wretchedest creature on record. Society is in a conspiracy against me. I'm the most literary man alive. I'm full of scholarship. I'm full of genius; I'm full of information; I'm full of novel views on every subject; yet look at my condition! I'm at this moment obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill!'

Mr Tigg replenished his friend's glass, pressed it into his hand, and nodded an intimation to the visitors that they would see him in a better aspect immediately.

'Obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill, eh!' repeated Mr Slyme, after a sulky application to his glass. 'Very pretty! And crowds of impostors, the while, becoming famous; men who are no more on a level with me than – Tigg, I take you to witness that I am the most persecuted hound on the face of the earth.'

With a whine, not unlike the cry of the animal he named, in its lowest state of humiliation, he raised his glass to his mouth again. He found some encouragement in it; for when he set it down he laughed scornfully. Upon that Mr Tigg gesticulated to the visitors once more, and with great expression, implying that now the time was come when they would see Chiv in his greatness.

'Ha, ha, ha,' laughed Mr Slyme. 'Obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill! Yet I think I've a rich uncle, Tigg, who could buy up the uncles of fifty strangers! Have I, or have I not? I come of a good family, I believe! Do I, or do I not? I'm not a man of common capacity or accomplishments, I think! Am I, or am I not?'

'You are the American aloe of the human race, my dear Chiv,' said Mr Tigg, 'which only blooms once in a hundred years!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed Mr Slyme again. 'Obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill! I obliged to two architect's apprentices. Fellows who measure earth with iron chains, and build houses like bricklayers. Give me the names of those two apprentices. How dare they oblige me!'

Mr Tigg was quite lost in admiration of this noble trait in his friend's character; as he made known to Mr Pinch in a neat little ballet of action, spontaneously invented for the purpose.

'I'll let 'em know, and I'll let all men know,' cried Chevy Slyme, 'that I'm none of the mean, grovelling, tame characters they meet with commonly. I have an independent spirit. I have a heart that swells in my bosom. I have a soul that rises superior to base considerations.'

'Oh Chiv, Chiv,' murmured Mr Tigg, 'you have a nobly independent nature, Chiv!'

'You go and do your duty, sir,' said Mr Slyme, angrily, 'and borrow money for travelling expenses; and whoever you borrow it of, let 'em know that I possess a haughty spirit, and a proud spirit, and have infernally finely-touched chords in my nature, which won't brook patronage. Do you hear? Tell 'em I hate 'em, and that that's the way I preserve my self-respect; and tell 'em that no man ever respected himself more than I do!'

He might have added that he hated two sorts of men; all those who did him favours, and all those who were better off than himself; as in either case their position was an insult to a man of his stupendous merits. But he did not; for with the apt closing words above recited, Mr Slyme; of too haughty a stomach to work, to beg, to borrow, or to steal; yet mean enough to be worked or borrowed, begged or stolen for, by any catspaw that would serve his turn; too insolent to lick the hand that fed him in his need, yet cur enough to bite and tear it in the dark; with these apt closing words Mr Slyme fell forward with his head upon the table, and so declined into a sodden sleep.

'Was there ever,' cried Mr Tigg, joining the young men at the door, and shutting it carefully behind him, 'such an independent spirit as is possessed by that extraordinary creature? Was there ever such a Roman as our friend Chiv? Was there ever a man of such a purely classical turn of thought, and of such a toga-like simplicity of nature? Was there ever a man with such a flow of eloquence? Might he not, gents both, I ask, have sat upon a tripod in the ancient times, and prophesied to a perfectly unlimited extent, if previously supplied with gin-and-water at the public cost?'

Mr Pinch was about to contest this latter position with his usual mildness, when, observing that his companion had already gone downstairs, he prepared to follow him.

'You are not going, Mr Pinch?' said Tigg.

'Thank you,' answered Tom. 'Yes. Don't come down.'

'Do you know that I should like one little word in private with you Mr Pinch?' said Tigg, following him. 'One minute of your company in the skittle-ground would very much relieve my mind. Might I beseech that favour?'

'Oh, certainly,' replied Tom, 'if you really wish it.' So he accompanied Mr Tigg to the retreat in question; on arriving at which place that gentleman took from his hat what seemed to be the fossil remains of an antediluvian pocket-handkerchief, and wiped his eyes therewith.

'You have not beheld me this day,' said Mr Tigg, 'in a favourable light.'

'Don't mention that,' said Tom, 'I beg.'

'But you have *not*,' cried Tigg. 'I must persist in that opinion. If you could have seen me, Mr Pinch, at the head of my regiment on the coast of Africa, charging in the form of a hollow square, with the women and children and the regimental plate-chest in the centre, you would not have known me for the same man. You would have respected me, sir.'

Tom had certain ideas of his own upon the subject of glory; and consequently he was not quite so much excited by this picture as Mr Tigg could have desired.

'But no matter!' said that gentleman. 'The school-boy writing home to his parents and describing the milk-and-water, said "This is indeed weakness." I repeat that assertion in reference to myself at the present moment; and I ask your pardon. Sir, you have seen my friend Slyme?'

'No doubt,' said Mr Pinch.

'Sir, you have been impressed by my friend Slyme?'

'Not very pleasantly, I must say,' answered Tom, after a little hesitation.

'I am grieved but not surprised,' cried Mr Tigg, detaining him with both hands, 'to hear that you have come to that conclusion; for it is my own. But, Mr Pinch, though I am a rough and thoughtless man, I can honour Mind. I honour Mind in following my friend. To you of all men, Mr Pinch, I have a right to make appeal on Mind's behalf, when it has not the art to push its fortune in the world. And so, sir – not for myself, who have no claim upon you, but for my crushed, my sensitive and independent friend, who has – I ask the loan of three half-crowns. I ask you for the loan of three half-crowns,

distinctly, and without a blush. I ask it, almost as a right. And when I add that they will be returned by post, this week, I feel that you will blame me for that sordid stipulation.'

Mr Pinch took from his pocket an old-fashioned red-leather purse with a steel clasp, which had probably once belonged to his deceased grandmother. It held one half-sovereign and no more. All Tom's worldly wealth until next quarter-day.

'Stay!' cried Mr Tigg, who had watched this proceeding keenly. 'I was just about to say, that for the convenience of posting you had better make it gold. Thank you. A general direction, I suppose, to Mr Pinch at Mr Pecksniff's – will that find you?'

'That'll find me,' said Tom. 'You had better put Esquire to Mr Pecksniff's name, if you please. Direct to me, you know, at Seth Pecksniff's, Esquire.'

'At Seth Pecksniff's, Esquire,' repeated Mr Tigg, taking an exact note of it with a stump of pencil. 'We said this week, I believe?'

'Yes; or Monday will do,' observed Tom.

'No, no, I beg your pardon. Monday will *not* do,' said Mr Tigg. 'If we stipulated for this week, Saturday is the latest day. Did we stipulate for this week?'

'Since you are so particular about it,' said Tom, 'I think we did.'

Mr Tigg added this condition to his memorandum; read the entry over to himself with a severe frown; and that the transaction might be the more correct and business-like, appended his initials to the whole. That done, he assured Mr Pinch that everything was now perfectly regular; and, after squeezing his hand with great fervour, departed.

Tom entertained enough suspicion that Martin might possibly turn this interview into a jest, to render him desirous to avoid the company of that young gentleman for the present. With this view he took a few turns up and down the skittle-ground, and did not re-enter the house until Mr Tigg and his friend had quitted it, and the new pupil and Mark were watching their departure from one of the windows.

'I was just a-saying, sir, that if one could live by it,' observed Mark, pointing after their late guests, 'that would be the sort of service for me. Waiting on such individuals as them would be better than grave-digging, sir.'

'And staying here would be better than either, Mark,' replied Tom. 'So take my advice, and continue to swim easily in smooth water.'

'It's too late to take it now, sir,' said Mark. 'I have broke it to her, sir. I am off to-morrow morning.'

'Off!' cried Mr Pinch, 'where to?'

'I shall go up to London, sir.'

'What to be?' asked Mr Pinch.

'Well! I don't know yet, sir. Nothing turned up that day I opened my mind to you, as was at all likely to suit me. All them trades I thought of was a deal too jolly; there was no credit at all to be got in any of 'em. I must look for a private service, I suppose, sir. I might be brought out strong, perhaps, in a serious family, Mr Pinch.'

'Perhaps you might come out rather too strong for a serious family's taste, Mark.'

'That's possible, sir. If I could get into a wicked family, I might do myself justice; but the difficulty is to make sure of one's ground, because a young man can't very well advertise that he wants a place, and wages an't so much an object as a wicked sitivation; can he, sir?'

'Why, no,' said Mr Pinch, 'I don't think he can.'

'An envious family,' pursued Mark, with a thoughtful face; 'or a quarrelsome family, or a malicious family, or even a good out-and-out mean family, would open a field of action as I might do something in. The man as would have suited me of all other men was that old gentleman as was took ill here, for he really was a trying customer. Howsever, I must wait and see what turns up, sir; and hope for the worst.'

'You are determined to go then?' said Mr Pinch.

'My box is gone already, sir, by the waggon, and I'm going to walk on to-morrow morning, and get a lift by the day coach when it overtakes me. So I wish you good-bye, Mr Pinch – and you too, sir – and all good luck and happiness!'

They both returned his greeting laughingly, and walked home arm-in-arm. Mr Pinch imparting to his new friend, as they went, such further particulars of Mark Tapley's whimsical restlessness as the reader is already acquainted with.

In the meantime Mark, having a shrewd notion that his mistress was in very low spirits, and that he could not exactly answer for the consequences of any lengthened *tete-a-tete* in the bar, kept himself obstinately out of her way all the afternoon and evening. In this piece of generalship he was very much assisted by the great influx of company into the taproom; for the news of his intention having gone abroad, there was a perfect throng there all the evening, and much drinking of healths and clinking of mugs. At length the house was closed for the night; and there being now no help for it, Mark put the best face he could upon the matter, and walked doggedly to the bar-door.

'If I look at her,' said Mark to himself, 'I'm done. I feel that I'm a-going fast.'

'You have come at last,' said Mrs Lupin.

Aye, Mark said: There he was.

'And you are determined to leave us, Mark?' cried Mrs Lupin.

'Why, yes; I am,' said Mark; keeping his eyes hard upon the floor.

'I thought,' pursued the landlady, with a most engaging hesitation, 'that you had been – fond – of the Dragon?'

'So I am,' said Mark.

'Then,' pursued the hostess – and it really was not an unnatural inquiry – 'why do you desert it?'

But as he gave no manner of answer to this question; not even on its being repeated; Mrs Lupin put his money into his hand, and asked him – not unkindly, quite the contrary – what he would take?

It is proverbial that there are certain things which flesh and blood cannot bear. Such a question as this, propounded in such a manner, at such a time, and by such a person, proved (at least, as far as, Mark's flesh and blood were concerned) to be one of them. He looked up in spite of himself directly; and having once looked up, there was no looking down again; for of all the tight, plump, buxom, bright-eyed, dimple-faced landladies that ever shone on earth, there stood before him then, bodily in that bar, the very pink and pineapple.

'Why, I tell you what,' said Mark, throwing off all his constraint in an instant and seizing the hostess round the waist – at which she was not at all alarmed, for she knew what a good young man he was – 'if I took what I liked most, I should take you. If I only thought what was best for me, I should take you. If I took what nineteen young fellows in twenty would be glad to take, and would take at any price, I should take you. Yes, I should,' cried Mr Tapley, shaking his head expressively enough, and looking (in a momentary state of forgetfulness) rather hard at the hostess's ripe lips. 'And no man wouldn't wonder if I did!'

Mrs Lupin said he amazed her. She was astonished how he could say such things. She had never thought it of him.

'Why, I never thought if of myself till now!' said Mark, raising his eyebrows with a look of the merriest possible surprise. 'I always expected we should part, and never have no explanation; I meant to do it when I come in here just now; but there's something about you, as makes a man sensible. Then let us have a word or two together; letting it be understood beforehand,' he added this in a grave tone, to prevent the possibility of any mistake, 'that I'm not a-going to make no love, you know.'

There was for just one second a shade, though not by any means a dark one, on the landlady's open brow. But it passed off instantly, in a laugh that came from her very heart.

'Oh, very good!' she said; 'if there is to be no love-making, you had better take your arm away.'

'Lord, why should I!' cried Mark. 'It's quite innocent.'

'Of course it's innocent,' returned the hostess, 'or I shouldn't allow it.'

'Very well!' said Mark. 'Then let it be.'

There was so much reason in this that the landlady laughed again, suffered it to remain, and bade him say what he had to say, and be quick about it. But he was an impudent fellow, she added.

'Ha ha! I almost think I am!' cried Mark, 'though I never thought so before. Why, I can say anything to-night!' 'Say what you're going to say if you please, and be quick,' returned the landlady, 'for I want to get to bed.'

'Why, then, my dear good soul,' said Mark, 'and a kinder woman than you are never drawed breath – let me see the man as says she did! – what would be the likely consequence of us two being – '

'Oh nonsense!' cried Mrs Lupin. 'Don't talk about that any more.'

'No, no, but it an't nonsense,' said Mark; 'and I wish you'd attend. What would be the likely consequence of us two being married? If I can't be content and comfortable in this here lively Dragon now, is it to be looked for as I should be then? By no means. Very good. Then you, even with your good humour, would be always on the fret and worrit, always uncomfortable in your own mind, always a-thinking as you was getting too old for my taste, always a-picturing me to yourself as being chained up to the Dragon door, and wanting to break away. I don't know that it would be so,' said Mark, 'but I don't know that it mightn't be. I am a roving sort of chap, I know. I'm fond of change. I'm always a-thinking that with my good health and spirits it would be more creditable in me to be jolly where there's things a-going on to make one dismal. It may be a mistake of mine you see, but nothing short of trying how it acts will set it right. Then an't it best that I should go; particular when your free way has helped me out to say all this, and we can part as good friends as we have ever been since first I entered this here noble Dragon, which,' said Mr Tapley in conclusion, 'has my good word and my good wish to the day of my death!'

The hostess sat quite silent for a little time, but she very soon put both her hands in Mark's and shook them heartily.

'For you are a good man,' she said; looking into his face with a smile, which was rather serious for her. 'And I do believe have been a better friend to me to-night than ever I have had in all my life.'

'Oh! as to that, you know,' said Mark, 'that's nonsense. But love my heart alive!' he added, looking at her in a sort of rapture, 'if you *are* that way disposed, what a lot of suitable husbands there is as you may drive distracted!'

She laughed again at this compliment; and, once more shaking him by both hands, and bidding him, if he should ever want a friend, to remember her, turned gayly from the little bar and up the Dragon staircase.

'Humming a tune as she goes,' said Mark, listening, 'in case I should think she's at all put out, and should be made down-hearted. Come, here's some credit in being jolly, at last!'

With that piece of comfort, very ruefully uttered, he went, in anything but a jolly manner, to bed.

He rose early next morning, and was a-foot soon after sunrise. But it was of no use; the whole place was up to see Mark Tapley off; the boys, the dogs, the children, the old men, the busy people and the idlers; there they were, all calling out 'Good-b'ye, Mark,' after their own manner, and all sorry he was going. Somehow he had a kind of sense that his old mistress was peeping from her chamber-window, but he couldn't make up his mind to look back.

'Good-b'ye one, good-b'ye all!' cried Mark, waving his hat on the top of his walking-stick, as he strode at a quick pace up the little street. 'Hearty chaps them wheelwrights – hurrah! Here's the butcher's dog a-coming out of the garden – down, old fellow! And Mr Pinch a-going to his organ – good-b'ye, sir! And the terrier-bitch from over the way – hie, then, lass! And children enough to hand down human natur to the latest posterity – good-b'ye, boys and girls! There's some credit in it now. I'm a-coming out strong at last. These are the circumstances that would try a ordinary mind; but I'm uncommon jolly. Not quite as jolly as I could wish to be, but very near. Good-b'ye! good-b'ye!'

CHAPTER EIGHT

ACCOMPANIES MR PECKSNIFF AND HIS CHARMING DAUGHTERS TO THE CITY OF LONDON; AND RELATES WHAT FELL OUT UPON THEIR WAY THITHER

When Mr Pecksniff and the two young ladies got into the heavy coach at the end of the lane, they found it empty, which was a great comfort; particularly as the outside was quite full and the passengers looked very frosty. For as Mr Pecksniff justly observed – when he and his daughters had burrowed their feet deep in the straw, wrapped themselves to the chin, and pulled up both windows – it is always satisfactory to feel, in keen weather, that many other people are not as warm as you are. And this, he said, was quite natural, and a very beautiful arrangement; not confined to coaches, but extending itself into many social ramifications. 'For' (he observed), 'if every one were warm and well-fed, we should lose the satisfaction of admiring the fortitude with which certain conditions of men bear cold and hunger. And if we were no better off than anybody else, what would become of our sense of gratitude; which,' said Mr Pecksniff with tears in his eyes, as he shook his fist at a beggar who wanted to get up behind, 'is one of the holiest feelings of our common nature.'

His children heard with becoming reverence these moral precepts from the lips of their father, and signified their acquiescence in the same, by smiles. That he might the better feed and cherish that sacred flame of gratitude in his breast, Mr Pecksniff remarked that he would trouble his eldest daughter, even in this early stage of their journey, for the brandy-bottle. And from the narrow neck of that stone vessel he imbibed a copious refreshment.

'What are we?' said Mr Pecksniff, 'but coaches? Some of us are slow coaches' —

'Goodness, Pa!' cried Charity.

'Some of us, I say,' resumed her parent with increased emphasis, 'are slow coaches; some of us are fast coaches. Our passions are the horses; and rampant animals too – !'

'Really, Pa,' cried both the daughters at once. 'How very unpleasant.'

'And rampant animals too' repeated Mr Pecksniff with so much determination, that he may be said to have exhibited, at the moment a sort of moral rampancy himself;' – and Virtue is the drag. We start from The Mother's Arms, and we run to The Dust Shovel.'

When he had said this, Mr Pecksniff, being exhausted, took some further refreshment. When he had done that, he corked the bottle tight, with the air of a man who had effectually corked the subject also; and went to sleep for three stages.

The tendency of mankind when it falls asleep in coaches, is to wake up cross; to find its legs in its way; and its corns an aggravation. Mr Pecksniff not being exempt from the common lot of humanity found himself, at the end of his nap, so decidedly the victim of these infirmities, that he had an irresistible inclination to visit them upon his daughters; which he had already begun to do in the shape of divers random kicks, and other unexpected motions of his shoes, when the coach stopped, and after a short delay the door was opened.

'Now mind,' said a thin sharp voice in the dark. 'I and my son go inside, because the roof is full, but you agree only to charge us outside prices. It's quite understood that we won't pay more. Is it?'

'All right, sir,' replied the guard.

'Is there anybody inside now?' inquired the voice.

'Three passengers,' returned the guard.

'Then I ask the three passengers to witness this bargain, if they will be so good,' said the voice. 'My boy, I think we may safely get in.'

In pursuance of which opinion, two people took their seats in the vehicle, which was solemnly licensed by Act of Parliament to carry any six persons who could be got in at the door.

'That was lucky!' whispered the old man, when they moved on again. 'And a great stroke of policy in you to observe it. He, he, he! We couldn't have gone outside. I should have died of the rheumatism!'

Whether it occurred to the dutiful son that he had in some degree over-reached himself by contributing to the prolongation of his father's days; or whether the cold had effected his temper; is doubtful. But he gave his father such a nudge in reply, that that good old gentleman was taken with a cough which lasted for full five minutes without intermission, and goaded Mr Pecksniff to that pitch of irritation, that he said at last – and very suddenly:

'There is no room! There is really no room in this coach for any gentleman with a cold in his head!'

'Mine,' said the old man, after a moment's pause, 'is upon my chest, Pecksniff.'

The voice and manner, together, now that he spoke out; the composure of the speaker; the presence of his son; and his knowledge of Mr Pecksniff; afforded a clue to his identity which it was impossible to mistake.

'Hem! I thought,' said Mr Pecksniff, returning to his usual mildness, 'that I addressed a stranger. I find that I address a relative, Mr Anthony Chuzzlewit and his son Mr Jonas – for they, my dear children, are our travelling companions – will excuse me for an apparently harsh remark. It is not *my* desire to wound the feelings of any person with whom I am connected in family bonds. I may be a Hypocrite,' said Mr Pecksniff, cuttingly; 'but I am not a Brute.'

'Pooh, pooh!' said the old man. 'What signifies that word, Pecksniff? Hypocrite! why, we are all hypocrites. We were all hypocrites t'other day. I am sure I felt that to be agreed upon among us, or I shouldn't have called you one. We should not have been there at all, if we had not been hypocrites. The only difference between you and the rest was – shall I tell you the difference between you and the rest now, Pecksniff?'

'If you please, my good sir; if you please.'

'Why, the annoying quality in *you*, is,' said the old man, 'that you never have a confederate or partner in *your* juggling; you would deceive everybody, even those who practise the same art; and have a way with you, as if you – he, he, he! – as if you really believed yourself. I'd lay a handsome wager now,' said the old man, 'if I laid wagers, which I don't and never did, that you keep up appearances by a tacit understanding, even before your own daughters here. Now I, when I have a business scheme in hand, tell Jonas what it is, and we discuss it openly. You're not offended, Pecksniff?'

'Offended, my good sir!' cried that gentleman, as if he had received the highest compliments that language could convey.

'Are you travelling to London, Mr Pecksniff?' asked the son.

'Yes, Mr Jonas, we are travelling to London. We shall have the pleasure of your company all the way, I trust?'

'Oh! ecod, you had better ask father that,' said Jonas. 'I am not a-going to commit myself.'

Mr Pecksniff was, as a matter of course, greatly entertained by this retort. His mirth having subsided, Mr Jonas gave him to understand that himself and parent were in fact travelling to their home in the metropolis; and that, since the memorable day of the great family gathering, they had been tarrying in that part of the country, watching the sale of certain eligible investments, which they had had in their copartnership eye when they came down; for it was their custom, Mr Jonas said, whenever such a thing was practicable, to kill two birds with one stone, and never to throw away sprats, but as bait for whales. When he had communicated to Mr Pecksniff these pithy scraps of intelligence, he said, 'That if it was all the same to him, he would turn him over to father, and have a chat with the gals;' and in furtherance of this polite scheme, he vacated his seat adjoining that gentleman, and established himself in the opposite corner, next to the fair Miss Mercy.

The education of Mr Jonas had been conducted from his cradle on the strictest principles of the main chance. The very first word he learnt to spell was 'gain,' and the second (when he got into two

syllables), 'money.' But for two results, which were not clearly foreseen perhaps by his watchful parent in the beginning, his training may be said to have been unexceptionable. One of these flaws was, that having been long taught by his father to over-reach everybody, he had imperceptibly acquired a love of over-reaching that venerable monitor himself. The other, that from his early habits of considering everything as a question of property, he had gradually come to look, with impatience, on his parent as a certain amount of personal estate, which had no right whatever to be going at large, but ought to be secured in that particular description of iron safe which is commonly called a coffin, and banked in the grave.

'Well, cousin!' said Mr Jonas – 'Because we *are* cousins, you know, a few times removed – so you're going to London?'

Miss Mercy replied in the affirmative, pinching her sister's arm at the same time, and giggling excessively.

'Lots of beaux in London, cousin!' said Mr Jonas, slightly advancing his elbow.

'Indeed, sir!' cried the young lady. 'They won't hurt us, sir, I dare say.' And having given him this answer with great demureness she was so overcome by her own humour, that she was fain to stifle her merriment in her sister's shawl.

'Merry,' cried that more prudent damsel, 'really I am ashamed of you. How can you go on so? You wild thing!' At which Miss Merry only laughed the more, of course.

'I saw a wildness in her eye, t'other day,' said Mr Jonas, addressing Charity. 'But you're the one to sit solemn! I say – You were regularly prim, cousin!'

'Oh! The old-fashioned fright!' cried Merry, in a whisper. 'Cherry my dear, upon my word you must sit next him. I shall die outright if he talks to me any more; I shall, positively!' To prevent which fatal consequence, the buoyant creature skipped out of her seat as she spoke, and squeezed her sister into the place from which she had risen.

'Don't mind crowding me,' cried Mr Jonas. 'I like to be crowded by gals. Come a little closer, cousin.'

'No, thank you, sir,' said Charity.

'There's that other one a-laughing again,' said Mr Jonas; 'she's a-laughing at my father, I shouldn't wonder. If he puts on that old flannel nightcap of his, I don't know what she'll do! Is that my father a-snoring, Pecksniff?'

'Yes, Mr Jonas.'

'Tread upon his foot, will you be so good?' said the young gentleman. 'The foot next you's the gouty one.'

Mr Pecksniff hesitating to perform this friendly office, Mr Jonas did it himself; at the same time crying:

'Come, wake up, father, or you'll be having the nightmare, and screeching out, I know. – Do you ever have the nightmare, cousin?' he asked his neighbour, with characteristic gallantry, as he dropped his voice again.

'Sometimes,' answered Charity. 'Not often.'

'The other one,' said Mr Jonas, after a pause. 'Does *she* ever have the nightmare?'

'I don't know,' replied Charity. 'You had better ask her.'

'She laughs so,' said Jonas; 'there's no talking to her. Only hark how she's a-going on now! You're the sensible one, cousin!'

'Tut, tut!' cried Charity.

'Oh! But you are! You know you are!'

'Mercy is a little giddy,' said Miss Charity. But she'll sober down in time.'

'It'll be a very long time, then, if she does at all,' rejoined her cousin. 'Take a little more room.'

'I am afraid of crowding you,' said Charity. But she took it notwithstanding; and after one or two remarks on the extreme heaviness of the coach, and the number of places it stopped at, they fell into a silence which remained unbroken by any member of the party until supper-time.

Although Mr Jonas conducted Charity to the hotel and sat himself beside her at the board, it was pretty clear that he had an eye to 'the other one' also, for he often glanced across at Mercy, and seemed to draw comparisons between the personal appearance of the two, which were not unfavourable to the superior plumpness of the younger sister. He allowed himself no great leisure for this kind of observation, however, being busily engaged with the supper, which, as he whispered in his fair companion's ear, was a contract business, and therefore the more she ate, the better the bargain was. His father and Mr Pecksniff, probably acting on the same wise principle, demolished everything that came within their reach, and by that means acquired a greasy expression of countenance, indicating contentment, if not repletion, which it was very pleasant to contemplate.

When they could eat no more, Mr Pecksniff and Mr Jonas subscribed for two sixpenny-worths of hot brandy-and-water, which the latter gentleman considered a more politic order than one shillingsworth; there being a chance of their getting more spirit out of the innkeeper under this arrangement than if it were all in one glass. Having swallowed his share of the enlivening fluid, Mr Pecksniff, under pretence of going to see if the coach were ready, went secretly to the bar, and had his own little bottle filled, in order that he might refresh himself at leisure in the dark coach without being observed.

These arrangements concluded, and the coach being ready, they got into their old places and jogged on again. But before he composed himself for a nap, Mr Pecksniff delivered a kind of grace after meat, in these words:

'The process of digestion, as I have been informed by anatomical friends, is one of the most wonderful works of nature. I do not know how it may be with others, but it is a great satisfaction to me to know, when regaling on my humble fare, that I am putting in motion the most beautiful machinery with which we have any acquaintance. I really feel at such times as if I was doing a public service. When I have wound myself up, if I may employ such a term,' said Mr Pecksniff with exquisite tenderness, 'and know that I am Going, I feel that in the lesson afforded by the works within me, I am a Benefactor to my Kind!'

As nothing could be added to this, nothing was said; and Mr Pecksniff, exulting, it may be presumed, in his moral utility, went to sleep again.

The rest of the night wore away in the usual manner. Mr Pecksniff and Old Anthony kept tumbling against each other and waking up much terrified, or crushed their heads in opposite corners of the coach and strangely tattooed the surface of their faces – Heaven knows how – in their sleep. The coach stopped and went on, and went on and stopped, times out of number. Passengers got up and passengers got down, and fresh horses came and went and came again, with scarcely any interval between each team as it seemed to those who were dozing, and with a gap of a whole night between every one as it seemed to those who were broad awake. At length they began to jolt and rumble over horribly uneven stones, and Mr Pecksniff looking out of window said it was to-morrow morning, and they were there.

Very soon afterwards the coach stopped at the office in the city; and the street in which it was situated was already in a bustle, that fully bore out Mr Pecksniff's words about its being morning, though for any signs of day yet appearing in the sky it might have been midnight. There was a dense fog too; as if it were a city in the clouds, which they had been travelling to all night up a magic beanstalk; and there was a thick crust upon the pavement like oilcake; which, one of the outsides (mad, no doubt) said to another (his keeper, of course), was Snow.

Taking a confused leave of Anthony and his son, and leaving the luggage of himself and daughters at the office to be called for afterwards, Mr Pecksniff, with one of the young ladies under each arm, dived across the street, and then across other streets, and so up the queerest courts, and

down the strangest alleys and under the blindest archways, in a kind of frenzy; now skipping over a kennel, now running for his life from a coach and horses; now thinking he had lost his way, now thinking he had found it; now in a state of the highest confidence, now despondent to the last degree, but always in a great perspiration and flurry; until at length they stopped in a kind of paved yard near the Monument. That is to say, Mr Pecksniff told them so; for as to anything they could see of the Monument, or anything else but the buildings close at hand, they might as well have been playing blindman's buff at Salisbury.

Mr Pecksniff looked about him for a moment, and then knocked at the door of a very dingy edifice, even among the choice collection of dingy edifices at hand; on the front of which was a little oval board like a tea-tray, with this inscription – 'Commercial Boarding-House: M. Todgers.'

It seemed that M. Todgers was not up yet, for Mr Pecksniff knocked twice and rang thrice, without making any impression on anything but a dog over the way. At last a chain and some bolts were withdrawn with a rusty noise, as if the weather had made the very fastenings hoarse, and a small boy with a large red head, and no nose to speak of, and a very dirty Wellington boot on his left arm, appeared; who (being surprised) rubbed the nose just mentioned with the back of a shoe-brush, and said nothing.

'Still a-bed my man?' asked Mr Pecksniff.

'Still a-bed!' replied the boy. 'I wish they wos still a-bed. They're very noisy a-bed; all calling for their boots at once. I thought you was the Paper, and wondered why you didn't shove yourself through the grating as usual. What do you want?'

Considering his years, which were tender, the youth may be said to have preferred this question sternly, and in something of a defiant manner. But Mr Pecksniff, without taking umbrage at his bearing put a card in his hand, and bade him take that upstairs, and show them in the meanwhile into a room where there was a fire.

'Or if there's one in the eating parlour,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'I can find it myself.' So he led his daughters, without waiting for any further introduction, into a room on the ground-floor, where a table-cloth (rather a tight and scanty fit in reference to the table it covered) was already spread for breakfast; displaying a mighty dish of pink boiled beef; an instance of that particular style of loaf which is known to housekeepers as a slack-baked, crummy quartern; a liberal provision of cups and saucers; and the usual appendages.

Inside the fender were some half-dozen pairs of shoes and boots, of various sizes, just cleaned and turned with the soles upwards to dry; and a pair of short black gaiters, on one of which was chalked – in sport, it would appear, by some gentleman who had slipped down for the purpose, pending his toilet, and gone up again – 'Jinkins's Particular,' while the other exhibited a sketch in profile, claiming to be the portrait of Jinkins himself.

M. Todgers's Commercial Boarding-House was a house of that sort which is likely to be dark at any time; but that morning it was especially dark. There was an odd smell in the passage, as if the concentrated essence of all the dinners that had been cooked in the kitchen since the house was built, lingered at the top of the kitchen stairs to that hour, and like the Black Friar in Don Juan, 'wouldn't be driven away.' In particular, there was a sensation of cabbage; as if all the greens that had ever been boiled there, were evergreens, and flourished in immortal strength. The parlour was wainscoted, and communicated to strangers a magnetic and instinctive consciousness of rats and mice. The staircase was very gloomy and very broad, with balustrades so thick and heavy that they would have served for a bridge. In a sombre corner on the first landing, stood a gruff old giant of a clock, with a preposterous coronet of three brass balls on his head; whom few had ever seen – none ever looked in the face – and who seemed to continue his heavy tick for no other reason than to warn heedless people from running into him accidentally. It had not been papered or painted, hadn't Todgers's, within the memory of man. It was very black, begrimed, and mouldy. And, at the top of the staircase, was an old, disjointed, rickety, ill-favoured skylight, patched and mended in all kinds of

ways, which looked distrustfully down at everything that passed below, and covered Todgers's up as if it were a sort of human cucumber-frame, and only people of a peculiar growth were reared there.

Mr Pecksniff and his fair daughters had not stood warming themselves at the fire ten minutes, when the sound of feet was heard upon the stairs, and the presiding deity of the establishment came hurrying in.

M. Todgers was a lady, rather a bony and hard-featured lady, with a row of curls in front of her head, shaped like little barrels of beer; and on the top of it something made of net – you couldn't call it a cap exactly – which looked like a black cobweb. She had a little basket on her arm, and in it a bunch of keys that jingled as she came. In her other hand she bore a flaming tallow candle, which, after surveying Mr Pecksniff for one instant by its light, she put down upon the table, to the end that she might receive him with the greater cordiality.

'Mr Pecksniff!' cried Mrs Todgers. 'Welcome to London! Who would have thought of such a visit as this, after so – dear, dear! – so many years! How do you *do*, Mr Pecksniff?'

'As well as ever; and as glad to see you, as ever;' Mr Pecksniff made response. 'Why, you are younger than you used to be!'

'*You* are, I am sure!' said Mrs Todgers. 'You're not a bit changed.'

'What do you say to this?' cried Mr Pecksniff, stretching out his hand towards the young ladies. 'Does this make me no older?'

'Not your daughters!' exclaimed the lady, raising her hands and clasping them. 'Oh, no, Mr Pecksniff! Your second, and her bridesmaid!'

Mr Pecksniff smiled complacently; shook his head; and said, 'My daughters, Mrs Todgers. Merely my daughters.'

'Ah!' sighed the good lady, 'I must believe you, for now I look at 'em I think I should have known 'em anywhere. My dear Miss Pecksniffs, how happy your Pa has made me!'

She hugged them both; and being by this time overpowered by her feelings or the inclemency of the morning, jerked a little pocket handkerchief out of the little basket, and applied the same to her face.

'Now, my good madam,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'I know the rules of your establishment, and that you only receive gentlemen boarders. But it occurred to me, when I left home, that perhaps you would give my daughters house room, and make an exception in their favour.'

'Perhaps?' cried Mrs Todgers ecstatically. 'Perhaps?'

'I may say then, that I was sure you would,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'I know that you have a little room of your own, and that they can be comfortable there, without appearing at the general table.'

'Dear girls!' said Mrs Todgers. 'I must take that liberty once more.'

Mrs Todgers meant by this that she must embrace them once more, which she accordingly did with great ardour. But the truth was that the house being full with the exception of one bed, which would now be occupied by Mr Pecksniff, she wanted time for consideration; and so much time too (for it was a knotty point how to dispose of them), that even when this second embrace was over, she stood for some moments gazing at the sisters, with affection beaming in one eye, and calculation shining out of the other.

'I think I know how to arrange it,' said Mrs Todgers, at length. 'A sofa bedstead in the little third room which opens from my own parlour. – Oh, you dear girls!'

Thereupon she embraced them once more, observing that she could not decide which was most like their poor mother (which was highly probable, seeing that she had never beheld that lady), but that she rather thought the youngest was; and then she said that as the gentlemen would be down directly, and the ladies were fatigued with travelling, would they step into her room at once?

It was on the same floor; being, in fact, the back parlour; and had, as Mrs Todgers said, the great advantage (in London) of not being overlooked; as they would see when the fog cleared off. Nor was this a vainglorious boast, for it commanded at a perspective of two feet, a brown wall with a

black cistern on the top. The sleeping apartment designed for the young ladies was approached from this chamber by a mightily convenient little door, which would only open when fallen against by a strong person. It commanded from a similar point of sight another angle of the wall, and another side of the cistern. 'Not the damp side,' said Mrs Todgers. '*That* is Mr Jinkins's.'

In the first of these sanctuaries a fire was speedily kindled by the youthful porter, who, whistling at his work in the absence of Mrs Todgers (not to mention his sketching figures on his corduroys with burnt firewood), and being afterwards taken by that lady in the fact, was dismissed with a box on his ears. Having prepared breakfast for the young ladies with her own hands, she withdrew to preside in the other room; where the joke at Mr Jinkins's expense seemed to be proceeding rather noisily.

'I won't ask you yet, my dears,' said Mr Pecksniff, looking in at the door, 'how you like London. Shall I?'

'We haven't seen much of it, Pa!' cried Merry.

'Nothing, I hope,' said Cherry. (Both very miserably.)

'Indeed,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'that's true. We have our pleasure, and our business too, before us. All in good time. All in good time!'

Whether Mr Pecksniff's business in London was as strictly professional as he had given his new pupil to understand, we shall see, to adopt that worthy man's phraseology, 'all in good time.'

CHAPTER NINE

TOWN AND TODGER'S

Surely there never was, in any other borough, city, or hamlet in the world, such a singular sort of a place as Todgers's. And surely London, to judge from that part of it which hemmed Todgers's round and hustled it, and crushed it, and stuck its brick-and-mortar elbows into it, and kept the air from it, and stood perpetually between it and the light, was worthy of Todgers's, and qualified to be on terms of close relationship and alliance with hundreds and thousands of the odd family to which Todgers's belonged.

You couldn't walk about Todgers's neighbourhood, as you could in any other neighbourhood. You groped your way for an hour through lanes and byways, and court-yards, and passages; and you never once emerged upon anything that might be reasonably called a street. A kind of resigned distraction came over the stranger as he trod those devious mazes, and, giving himself up for lost, went in and out and round about and quietly turned back again when he came to a dead wall or was stopped by an iron railing, and felt that the means of escape might possibly present themselves in their own good time, but that to anticipate them was hopeless. Instances were known of people who, being asked to dine at Todgers's, had travelled round and round for a weary time, with its very chimney-pots in view; and finding it, at last, impossible of attainment, had gone home again with a gentle melancholy on their spirits, tranquil and uncomplaining. Nobody had ever found Todgers's on a verbal direction, though given within a few minutes' walk of it. Cautious emigrants from Scotland or the North of England had been known to reach it safely, by impressing a charity-boy, town-bred, and bringing him along with them; or by clinging tenaciously to the postman; but these were rare exceptions, and only went to prove the rule that Todgers's was in a labyrinth, whereof the mystery was known but to a chosen few.

Several fruit-brokers had their marts near Todgers's; and one of the first impressions wrought upon the stranger's senses was of oranges – of damaged oranges – with blue and green bruises on them, festering in boxes, or mouldering away in cellars. All day long, a stream of porters from the wharves beside the river, each bearing on his back a bursting chest of oranges, poured slowly through the narrow passages; while underneath the archway by the public-house, the knots of those who rested and regaled within, were piled from morning until night. Strange solitary pumps were found near Todgers's hiding themselves for the most part in blind alleys, and keeping company with fire-ladders. There were churches also by dozens, with many a ghostly little churchyard, all overgrown with such straggling vegetation as springs up spontaneously from damp, and graves, and rubbish. In some of these dingy resting-places which bore much the same analogy to green churchyards, as the pots of earth for mignonette and wall-flower in the windows overlooking them did to rustic gardens, there were trees; tall trees; still putting forth their leaves in each succeeding year, with such a languishing remembrance of their kind (so one might fancy, looking on their sickly boughs) as birds in cages have of theirs. Here, paralysed old watchmen guarded the bodies of the dead at night, year after year, until at last they joined that solemn brotherhood; and, saving that they slept below the ground a sounder sleep than even they had ever known above it, and were shut up in another kind of box, their condition can hardly be said to have undergone any material change when they, in turn, were watched themselves.

Among the narrow thoroughfares at hand, there lingered, here and there, an ancient doorway of carved oak, from which, of old, the sounds of revelry and feasting often came; but now these mansions, only used for storehouses, were dark and dull, and, being filled with wool, and cotton,

and the like – such heavy merchandise as stifles sound and stops the throat of echo – had an air of palpable deadness about them which, added to their silence and desertion, made them very grim. In like manner, there were gloomy courtyards in these parts, into which few but belated wayfarers ever strayed, and where vast bags and packs of goods, upward or downward bound, were for ever dangling between heaven and earth from lofty cranes There were more trucks near Todgers's than you would suppose whole city could ever need; not active trucks, but a vagabond race, for ever lounging in the narrow lanes before their masters' doors and stopping up the pass; so that when a stray hackney-coach or lumbering waggon came that way, they were the cause of such an uproar as enlivened the whole neighbourhood, and made the bells in the next churchtower vibrate again. In the throats and maws of dark no-thoroughfares near Todgers's, individual wine-merchants and wholesale dealers in grocery-ware had perfect little towns of their own; and, deep among the foundations of these buildings, the ground was undermined and burrowed out into stables, where cart-horses, troubled by rats, might be heard on a quiet Sunday rattling their halters, as disturbed spirits in tales of haunted houses are said to clank their chains.

To tell of half the queer old taverns that had a drowsy and secret existence near Todgers's, would fill a goodly book; while a second volume no less capacious might be devoted to an account of the quaint old guests who frequented their dimly lighted parlours. These were, in general, ancient inhabitants of that region; born, and bred there from boyhood, who had long since become wheezy and asthmatical, and short of breath, except in the article of story-telling; in which respect they were still marvellously long-winded. These gentry were much opposed to steam and all new-fangled ways, and held ballooning to be sinful, and deplored the degeneracy of the times; which that particular member of each little club who kept the keys of the nearest church, professionally, always attributed to the prevalence of dissent and irreligion; though the major part of the company inclined to the belief that virtue went out with hair-powder, and that Old England's greatness had decayed amain with barbers.

As to Todgers's itself – speaking of it only as a house in that neighbourhood, and making no reference to its merits as a commercial boarding establishment – it was worthy to stand where it did. There was one staircase-window in it, at the side of the house, on the ground floor; which tradition said had not been opened for a hundred years at least, and which, abutting on an always dirty lane, was so begrimed and coated with a century's mud, that no one pane of glass could possibly fall out, though all were cracked and broken twenty times. But the grand mystery of Todgers's was the cellarage, approachable only by a little back door and a rusty grating; which cellarage within the memory of man had had no connection with the house, but had always been the freehold property of somebody else, and was reported to be full of wealth; though in what shape – whether in silver, brass, or gold, or butts of wine, or casks of gun-powder – was matter of profound uncertainty and supreme indifference to Todgers's and all its inmates.

The top of the house was worthy of notice. There was a sort of terrace on the roof, with posts and fragments of rotten lines, once intended to dry clothes upon; and there were two or three tea-chests out there, full of earth, with forgotten plants in them, like old walking-sticks. Whoever climbed to this observatory, was stunned at first from having knocked his head against the little door in coming out; and after that, was for the moment choked from having looked perforce, straight down the kitchen chimney; but these two stages over, there were things to gaze at from the top of Todgers's, well worth your seeing too. For first and foremost, if the day were bright, you observed upon the house-tops, stretching far away, a long dark path; the shadow of the Monument; and turning round, the tall original was close beside you, with every hair erect upon his golden head, as if the doings of the city frightened him. Then there were steeples, towers, belfries, shining vanes, and masts of ships; a very forest. Gables, housetops, garret-windows, wilderness upon wilderness. Smoke and noise enough for all the world at once.

After the first glance, there were slight features in the midst of this crowd of objects, which sprung out from the mass without any reason, as it were, and took hold of the attention whether

the spectator would or no. Thus, the revolving chimney-pots on one great stack of buildings seemed to be turning gravely to each other every now and then, and whispering the result of their separate observation of what was going on below. Others, of a crook-backed shape, appeared to be maliciously holding themselves askew, that they might shut the prospect out and baffle Todgers's. The man who was mending a pen at an upper window over the way, became of paramount importance in the scene, and made a blank in it, ridiculously disproportionate in its extent, when he retired. The gambols of a piece of cloth upon the dyer's pole had far more interest for the moment than all the changing motion of the crowd. Yet even while the looker-on felt angry with himself for this, and wondered how it was, the tumult swelled into a roar; the hosts of objects seemed to thicken and expand a hundredfold, and after gazing round him, quite scared, he turned into Todgers's again, much more rapidly than he came out; and ten to one he told M. Todgers afterwards that if he hadn't done so, he would certainly have come into the street by the shortest cut; that is to say, head-foremost.

So said the two Miss Pecksniffs, when they retired with Mrs Todgers from this place of espial, leaving the youthful porter to close the door and follow them downstairs; who, being of a playful temperament, and contemplating with a delight peculiar to his sex and time of life, any chance of dashing himself into small fragments, lingered behind to walk upon the parapet.

It being the second day of their stay in London, the Miss Pecksniffs and Mrs Todgers were by this time highly confidential, insomuch that the last-named lady had already communicated the particulars of three early disappointments of a tender nature; and had furthermore possessed her young friends with a general summary of the life, conduct, and character of Mr Todgers. Who, it seemed, had cut his matrimonial career rather short, by unlawfully running away from his happiness, and establishing himself in foreign countries as a bachelor.

'Your pa was once a little particular in his attentions, my dears,' said Mrs Todgers, 'but to be your ma was too much happiness denied me. You'd hardly know who this was done for, perhaps?'

She called their attention to an oval miniature, like a little blister, which was tacked up over the kettle-holder, and in which there was a dreamy shadowing forth of her own visage.

'It's a speaking likeness!' cried the two Miss Pecksniffs.

'It was considered so once,' said Mrs Todgers, warming herself in a gentlemanly manner at the fire; 'but I hardly thought you would have known it, my loves.'

They would have known it anywhere. If they could have met with it in the street, or seen it in a shop window, they would have cried 'Good gracious! Mrs Todgers!'

'Presiding over an establishment like this, makes sad havoc with the features, my dear Miss Pecksniffs,' said Mrs Todgers. 'The gravy alone, is enough to add twenty years to one's age, I do assure you.'

'Lor'!' cried the two Miss Pecksniffs.

'The anxiety of that one item, my dears,' said Mrs Todgers, 'keeps the mind continually upon the stretch. There is no such passion in human nature, as the passion for gravy among commercial gentlemen. It's nothing to say a joint won't yield – a whole animal wouldn't yield – the amount of gravy they expect each day at dinner. And what I have undergone in consequence,' cried Mrs Todgers, raising her eyes and shaking her head, 'no one would believe!'

'Just like Mr Pinch, Merry!' said Charity. 'We have always noticed it in him, you remember?'

'Yes, my dear,' giggled Merry, 'but we have never given it him, you know.'

'You, my dears, having to deal with your pa's pupils who can't help themselves, are able to take your own way,' said Mrs Todgers; 'but in a commercial establishment, where any gentleman may say any Saturday evening, "Mrs Todgers, this day week we part, in consequence of the cheese," it is not so easy to preserve a pleasant understanding. Your pa was kind enough,' added the good lady, 'to invite me to take a ride with you to-day; and I think he mentioned that you were going to call upon Miss Pinch. Any relation to the gentleman you were speaking of just now, Miss Pecksniff?'

'For goodness sake, Mrs Todgers,' interposed the lively Merry, 'don't call him a gentleman. My dear Cherry, Pinch a gentleman! The idea!'

'What a wicked girl you are!' cried Mrs Todgers, embracing her with great affection. 'You are quite a quiz, I do declare! My dear Miss Pecksniff, what a happiness your sister's spirits must be to your pa and self!'

'He's the most hideous, goggle-eyed creature, Mrs Todgers, in existence,' resumed Merry: 'quite an ogre. The ugliest, awkwardest frightfullest being, you can imagine. This is his sister, so I leave you to suppose what *she* is. I shall be obliged to laugh outright, I know I shall!' cried the charming girl, 'I never shall be able to keep my countenance. The notion of a Miss Pinch presuming to exist at all is sufficient to kill one, but to see her – oh my stars!'

Mrs Todgers laughed immensely at the dear love's humour, and declared she was quite afraid of her, that she was. She was so very severe.

'Who is severe?' cried a voice at the door. 'There is no such thing as severity in our family, I hope!' And then Mr Pecksniff peeped smilingly into the room, and said, 'May I come in, Mrs Todgers?'

Mrs Todgers almost screamed, for the little door of communication between that room and the inner one being wide open, there was a full disclosure of the sofa bedstead in all its monstrous impropriety. But she had the presence of mind to close this portal in the twinkling of an eye; and having done so, said, though not without confusion, 'Oh yes, Mr Pecksniff, you can come in, if you please.'

'How are we to-day,' said Mr Pecksniff, jocosely, 'and what are our plans? Are we ready to go and see Tom Pinch's sister? Ha, ha, ha! Poor Thomas Pinch!'

'Are we ready,' returned Mrs Todgers, nodding her head with mysterious intelligence, 'to send a favourable reply to Mr Jinkins's round-robin? That's the first question, Mr Pecksniff.'

'Why Mr Jinkins's robin, my dear madam?' asked Mr Pecksniff, putting one arm round Mercy, and the other round Mrs Todgers, whom he seemed, in the abstraction of the moment, to mistake for Charity. 'Why Mr Jinkins's?'

'Because he began to get it up, and indeed always takes the lead in the house,' said Mrs Todgers, playfully. 'That's why, sir.'

'Jinkins is a man of superior talents,' observed Mr Pecksniff. 'I have conceived a great regard for Jinkins. I take Jinkins's desire to pay polite attention to my daughters, as an additional proof of the friendly feeling of Jinkins, Mrs Todgers.'

'Well now,' returned that lady, 'having said so much, you must say the rest, Mr Pecksniff; so tell the dear young ladies all about it.'

With these words she gently eluded Mr Pecksniff's grasp, and took Miss Charity into her own embrace; though whether she was impelled to this proceeding solely by the irrepressible affection she had conceived for that young lady, or whether it had any reference to a lowering, not to say distinctly spiteful expression which had been visible in her face for some moments, has never been exactly ascertained. Be this as it may, Mr Pecksniff went on to inform his daughters of the purport and history of the round-robin aforesaid, which was in brief, that the commercial gentlemen who helped to make up the sum and substance of that noun of multitude signifying many, called Todgers's, desired the honour of their presence at the general table, so long as they remained in the house, and besought that they would grace the board at dinner-time next day, the same being Sunday. He further said, that Mrs Todgers being a consenting party to this invitation, he was willing, for his part, to accept it; and so left them that he might write his gracious answer, the while they armed themselves with their best bonnets for the utter defeat and overthrow of Miss Pinch.

Tom Pinch's sister was governess in a family, a lofty family; perhaps the wealthiest brass and copper founders' family known to mankind. They lived at Camberwell; in a house so big and fierce, that its mere outside, like the outside of a giant's castle, struck terror into vulgar minds and made

bold persons quail. There was a great front gate; with a great bell, whose handle was in itself a note of admiration; and a great lodge; which being close to the house, rather spoilt the look-out certainly but made the look-in tremendous. At this entry, a great porter kept constant watch and ward; and when he gave the visitor high leave to pass, he rang a second great bell, responsive to whose note a great footman appeared in due time at the great halldoor, with such great tags upon his liveried shoulder that he was perpetually entangling and hooking himself among the chairs and tables, and led a life of torment which could scarcely have been surpassed, if he had been a blue-bottle in a world of cobwebs.

To this mansion Mr Pecksniff, accompanied by his daughters and Mrs Todgers, drove gallantly in a one-horse fly. The foregoing ceremonies having been all performed, they were ushered into the house; and so, by degrees, they got at last into a small room with books in it, where Mr Pinch's sister was at that moment instructing her eldest pupil; to wit, a premature little woman of thirteen years old, who had already arrived at such a pitch of whalebone and education that she had nothing girlish about her, which was a source of great rejoicing to all her relations and friends.

'Visitors for Miss Pinch!' said the footman. He must have been an ingenious young man, for he said it very cleverly; with a nice discrimination between the cold respect with which he would have announced visitors to the family, and the warm personal interest with which he would have announced visitors to the cook.

'Visitors for Miss Pinch!'

Miss Pinch rose hastily; with such tokens of agitation as plainly declared that her list of callers was not numerous. At the same time, the little pupil became alarmingly upright, and prepared herself to take mental notes of all that might be said and done. For the lady of the establishment was curious in the natural history and habits of the animal called Governess, and encouraged her daughters to report thereon whenever occasion served; which was, in reference to all parties concerned, very laudable, improving, and pleasant.

It is a melancholy fact; but it must be related, that Mr Pinch's sister was not at all ugly. On the contrary, she had a good face; a very mild and prepossessing face; and a pretty little figure – slight and short, but remarkable for its neatness. There was something of her brother, much of him indeed, in a certain gentleness of manner, and in her look of timid trustfulness; but she was so far from being a fright, or a dowdy, or a horror, or anything else, predicted by the two Miss Pecksniffs, that those young ladies naturally regarded her with great indignation, feeling that this was by no means what they had come to see.

Miss Mercy, as having the larger share of gaiety, bore up the best against this disappointment, and carried it off, in outward show at least, with a titter; but her sister, not caring to hide her disdain, expressed it pretty openly in her looks. As to Mrs Todgers, she leaned on Mr Pecksniff's arm and preserved a kind of genteel grimness, suitable to any state of mind, and involving any shade of opinion.

'Don't be alarmed, Miss Pinch,' said Mr Pecksniff, taking her hand condescendingly in one of his, and patting it with the other. 'I have called to see you, in pursuance of a promise given to your brother, Thomas Pinch. My name – compose yourself, Miss Pinch – is Pecksniff.'

The good man emphasised these words as though he would have said, 'You see in me, young person, the benefactor of your race; the patron of your house; the preserver of your brother, who is fed with manna daily from my table; and in right of whom there is a considerable balance in my favour at present standing in the books beyond the sky. But I have no pride, for I can afford to do without it!'

The poor girl felt it all as if it had been Gospel truth. Her brother writing in the fullness of his simple heart, had often told her so, and how much more! As Mr Pecksniff ceased to speak, she hung her head, and dropped a tear upon his hand.

'Oh very well, Miss Pinch!' thought the sharp pupil, 'crying before strangers, as if you didn't like the situation!'

'Thomas is well,' said Mr Pecksniff; 'and sends his love and this letter. I cannot say, poor fellow, that he will ever be distinguished in our profession; but he has the will to do well, which is the next thing to having the power; and, therefore, we must bear with him. Eh?'

'I know he has the will, sir,' said Tom Pinch's sister, 'and I know how kindly and considerately you cherish it, for which neither he nor I can ever be grateful enough, as we very often say in writing to each other. The young ladies too,' she added, glancing gratefully at his two daughters, 'I know how much we owe to them.'

'My dears,' said Mr Pecksniff, turning to them with a smile: 'Thomas's sister is saying something you will be glad to hear, I think.'

'We can't take any merit to ourselves, papa!' cried Cherry, as they both apprised Tom Pinch's sister, with a curtsey, that they would feel obliged if she would keep her distance. 'Mr Pinch's being so well provided for is owing to you alone, and we can only say how glad we are to hear that he is as grateful as he ought to be.'

'Oh very well, Miss Pinch!' thought the pupil again. 'Got a grateful brother, living on other people's kindness!'

'It was very kind of you,' said Tom Pinch's sister, with Tom's own simplicity and Tom's own smile, 'to come here; very kind indeed; though how great a kindness you have done me in gratifying my wish to see you, and to thank you with my own lips, you, who make so light of benefits conferred, can scarcely think.'

'Very grateful; very pleasant; very proper,' murmured Mr Pecksniff.

'It makes me happy too,' said Ruth Pinch, who now that her first surprise was over, had a chatty, cheerful way with her, and a single-hearted desire to look upon the best side of everything, which was the very moral and image of Tom; 'very happy to think that you will be able to tell him how more than comfortably I am situated here, and how unnecessary it is that he should ever waste a regret on my being cast upon my own resources. Dear me! So long as I heard that he was happy, and he heard that I was,' said Tom's sister, 'we could both bear, without one impatient or complaining thought, a great deal more than ever we have had to endure, I am very certain.' And if ever the plain truth were spoken on this occasionally false earth, Tom's sister spoke it when she said that.

'Ah!' cried Mr Pecksniff whose eyes had in the meantime wandered to the pupil; 'certainly. And how do *you* do, my very interesting child?'

'Quite well, I thank you, sir,' replied that frosty innocent.

'A sweet face this, my dears,' said Mr Pecksniff, turning to his daughters. 'A charming manner!'

Both young ladies had been in ecstasies with the scion of a wealthy house (through whom the nearest road and shortest cut to her parents might be supposed to lie) from the first. Mrs Todgers vowed that anything one quarter so angelic she had never seen. 'She wanted but a pair of wings, a dear,' said that good woman, 'to be a young syrup' – meaning, possibly, young sylph, or seraph.

'If you will give that to your distinguished parents, my amiable little friend,' said Mr Pecksniff, producing one of his professional cards, 'and will say that I and my daughters – '

'And Mrs Todgers, pa,' said Merry.

'And Mrs Todgers, of London,' added Mr Pecksniff; 'that I, and my daughters, and Mrs Todgers, of London, did not intrude upon them, as our object simply was to take some notice of Miss Pinch, whose brother is a young man in my employment; but that I could not leave this very chaste mansion, without adding my humble tribute, as an Architect, to the correctness and elegance of the owner's taste, and to his just appreciation of that beautiful art to the cultivation of which I have devoted a life, and to the promotion of whose glory and advancement I have sacrified a – a fortune – I shall be very much obliged to you.'

'Missis's compliments to Miss Pinch,' said the footman, suddenly appearing, and speaking in exactly the same key as before, 'and begs to know wot my young lady is a-learning of just now.'

'Oh!' said Mr Pecksniff, 'Here is the young man. *he* will take the card. With my compliments, if you please, young man. My dears, we are interrupting the studies. Let us go.'

Some confusion was occasioned for an instant by Mrs Todgers's unstrapping her little flat hand-basket, and hurriedly entrusting the 'young man' with one of her own cards, which, in addition to certain detailed information relative to the terms of the commercial establishment, bore a foot-note to the effect that M. T. took that opportunity of thanking those gentlemen who had honoured her with their favours, and begged they would have the goodness, if satisfied with the table, to recommend her to their friends. But Mr Pecksniff, with admirable presence of mind, recovered this document, and buttoned it up in his own pocket.

Then he said to Miss Pinch – with more condescension and kindness than ever, for it was desirable the footman should expressly understand that they were not friends of hers, but patrons:

'Good morning. Good-bye. God bless you! You may depend upon my continued protection of your brother Thomas. Keep your mind quite at ease, Miss Pinch!'

'Thank you,' said Tom's sister heartily; 'a thousand times.'

'Not at all,' he retorted, patting her gently on the head. 'Don't mention it. You will make me angry if you do. My sweet child' – to the pupil – 'farewell! That fairy creature,' said Mr Pecksniff, looking in his pensive mood hard at the footman, as if he meant him, 'has shed a vision on my path, refulgent in its nature, and not easily to be obliterated. My dears, are you ready?'

They were not quite ready yet, for they were still caressing the pupil. But they tore themselves away at length; and sweeping past Miss Pinch with each a haughty inclination of the head and a curtsey strangled in its birth, flounced into the passage.

The young man had rather a long job in showing them out; for Mr Pecksniff's delight in the tastefulness of the house was such that he could not help often stopping (particularly when they were near the parlour door) and giving it expression, in a loud voice and very learned terms. Indeed, he delivered, between the study and the hall, a familiar exposition of the whole science of architecture as applied to dwelling-houses, and was yet in the freshness of his eloquence when they reached the garden.

'If you look,' said Mr Pecksniff, backing from the steps, with his head on one side and his eyes half-shut that he might the better take in the proportions of the exterior: 'If you look, my dears, at the cornice which supports the roof, and observe the airiness of its construction, especially where it sweeps the southern angle of the building, you will feel with me – How do you do, sir? I hope you're well?'

Interrupting himself with these words, he very politely bowed to a middle-aged gentleman at an upper window, to whom he spoke – not because the gentleman could hear him (for he certainly could not), but as an appropriate accompaniment to his salutation.

'I have no doubt, my dears,' said Mr Pecksniff, feigning to point out other beauties with his hand, 'that this is the proprietor. I should be glad to know him. It might lead to something. Is he looking this way, Charity?'

'He is opening the window pa!'

'Ha, ha!' cried Mr Pecksniff softly. 'All right! He has found I'm professional. He heard me inside just now, I have no doubt. Don't look! With regard to the fluted pillars in the portico, my dears – '

'Hallo!' cried the gentleman.

'Sir, your servant!' said Mr Pecksniff, taking off his hat. 'I am proud to make your acquaintance.'

'Come off the grass, will you!' roared the gentleman.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, doubtful of his having heard aright. 'Did you – ?'

'Come off the grass!' repeated the gentleman, warmly.

'We are unwilling to intrude, sir,' Mr Pecksniff smilingly began.

'But you *are* intruding,' returned the other, 'unwarrantably intruding. Trespassing. You see a gravel walk, don't you? What do you think it's meant for? Open the gate there! Show that party out!'

With that he clapped down the window again, and disappeared.

Mr Pecksniff put on his hat, and walked with great deliberation and in profound silence to the fly, gazing at the clouds as he went, with great interest. After helping his daughters and Mrs Todgers into that conveyance, he stood looking at it for some moments, as if he were not quite certain whether it was a carriage or a temple; but having settled this point in his mind, he got into his place, spread his hands out on his knees, and smiled upon the three beholders.

But his daughters, less tranquil-minded, burst into a torrent of indignation. This came, they said, of cherishing such creatures as the Pinches. This came of lowering themselves to their level. This came of putting themselves in the humiliating position of seeming to know such bold, audacious, cunning, dreadful girls as that. They had expected this. They had predicted it to Mrs Todgers, as she (Todgers) could depone, that very morning. To this, they added, that the owner of the house, supposing them to be Miss Pinch's friends, had acted, in their opinion, quite correctly, and had done no more than, under such circumstances, might reasonably have been expected. To that they added (with a trifling inconsistency), that he was a brute and a bear; and then they merged into a flood of tears, which swept away all wandering epithets before it.

Perhaps Miss Pinch was scarcely so much to blame in the matter as the Seraph, who, immediately on the withdrawal of the visitors, had hastened to report them at head-quarters, with a full account of their having presumptuously charged her with the delivery of a message afterwards consigned to the footman; which outrage, taken in conjunction with Mr Pecksniff's unobtrusive remarks on the establishment, might possibly have had some share in their dismissal. Poor Miss Pinch, however, had to bear the brunt of it with both parties; being so severely taken to task by the Seraph's mother for having such vulgar acquaintances, that she was fain to retire to her own room in tears, which her natural cheerfulness and submission, and the delight of having seen Mr Pecksniff, and having received a letter from her brother, were at first insufficient to repress.

As to Mr Pecksniff, he told them in the fly, that a good action was its own reward; and rather gave them to understand, that if he could have been kicked in such a cause, he would have liked it all the better. But this was no comfort to the young ladies, who scolded violently the whole way back, and even exhibited, more than once, a keen desire to attack the devoted Mrs Todgers; on whose personal appearance, but particularly on whose offending card and hand-basket, they were secretly inclined to lay the blame of half their failure.

Todgers's was in a great bustle that evening, partly owing to some additional domestic preparations for the morrow, and partly to the excitement always inseparable in that house from Saturday night, when every gentleman's linen arrived at a different hour in its own little bundle, with his private account pinned on the outside. There was always a great clinking of pattens downstairs, too, until midnight or so, on Saturdays; together with a frequent gleaming of mysterious lights in the area; much working at the pump; and a constant jangling of the iron handle of the pail. Shrill altercations from time to time arose between Mrs Todgers and unknown females in remote back kitchens; and sounds were occasionally heard, indicative of small articles of iron mongery and hardware being thrown at the boy. It was the custom of that youth on Saturdays, to roll up his shirt sleeves to his shoulders, and pervade all parts of the house in an apron of coarse green baize; moreover, he was more strongly tempted on Saturdays than on other days (it being a busy time), to make excursive bolts into the neighbouring alleys when he answered the door, and there to play at leap-frog and other sports with vagrant lads, until pursued and brought back by the hair of his head or the lobe of his ear; thus he was quite a conspicuous feature among the peculiar incidents of the last day in the week at Todgers's.

He was especially so on this particular Saturday evening, and honoured the Miss Pecksniffs with a deal of notice; seldom passing the door of Mrs Todgers's private room, where they sat alone before the fire, working by the light of a solitary candle, without putting in his head and greeting them with some such compliments as, 'There you are agin!' 'An't it nice?' – and similar humorous attentions.

'I say,' he whispered, stopping in one of his journeys to and fro, 'young ladies, there's soup to-morrow. She's a-making it now. An't she a-putting in the water? Oh! not at all neither!'

In the course of answering another knock, he thrust in his head again.

'I say! There's fowls to-morrow. Not skinny ones. Oh no!'

Presently he called through the key-hole:

'There's a fish to-morrow. Just come. Don't eat none of him!' And, with this special warning, vanished again.

By-and-bye, he returned to lay the cloth for supper; it having been arranged between Mrs Todgers and the young ladies, that they should partake of an exclusive veal-cutlet together in the privacy of that apartment. He entertained them on this occasion by thrusting the lighted candle into his mouth, and exhibiting his face in a state of transparency; after the performance of which feat, he went on with his professional duties; brightening every knife as he laid it on the table, by breathing on the blade and afterwards polishing the same on the apron already mentioned. When he had completed his preparations, he grinned at the sisters, and expressed his belief that the approaching collation would be of 'rather a spicy sort.'

'Will it be long, before it's ready, Bailey?' asked Mercy.

'No,' said Bailey, 'it *is* cooked. When I come up, she was dodging among the tender pieces with a fork, and eating of 'em.'

But he had scarcely achieved the utterance of these words, when he received a manual compliment on the head, which sent him staggering against the wall; and Mrs Todgers, dish in hand, stood indignantly before him.

'Oh you little villain!' said that lady. 'Oh you bad, false boy!'

'No worse than yerself,' retorted Bailey, guarding his head, on a principle invented by Mr Thomas Cribb. 'Ah! Come now! Do that again, will yer?'

'He's the most dreadful child,' said Mrs Todgers, setting down the dish, 'I ever had to deal with. The gentlemen spoil him to that extent, and teach him such things, that I'm afraid nothing but hanging will ever do him any good.'

'Won't it!' cried Bailey. 'Oh! Yes! Wot do you go a-lowerin the table-beer for then, and destroying my constitooshun?'

'Go downstairs, you vicious boy,' said Mrs Todgers, holding the door open. 'Do you hear me? Go along!'

After two or three dexterous feints, he went, and was seen no more that night, save once, when he brought up some tumblers and hot water, and much disturbed the two Miss Pecksniffs by squinting hideously behind the back of the unconscious Mrs Todgers. Having done this justice to his wounded feelings, he retired underground; where, in company with a swarm of black beetles and a kitchen candle, he employed his faculties in cleaning boots and brushing clothes until the night was far advanced.

Benjamin was supposed to be the real name of this young retainer but he was known by a great variety of names. Benjamin, for instance, had been converted into Uncle Ben, and that again had been corrupted into Uncle; which, by an easy transition, had again passed into Barnwell, in memory of the celebrated relative in that degree who was shot by his nephew George, while meditating in his garden at Camberwell. The gentlemen at Todgers's had a merry habit, too, of bestowing upon him, for the time being, the name of any notorious malefactor or minister; and sometimes when current events were flat they even sought the pages of history for these distinctions; as Mr Pitt, Young Brownrigg, and the like. At the period of which we write, he was generally known among the gentlemen as Bailey junior; a name bestowed upon him in contradistinction, perhaps, to Old Bailey; and possibly as involving the recollection of an unfortunate lady of the same name, who perished by her own hand early in life, and has been immortalised in a ballad.

The usual Sunday dinner-hour at Todgers's was two o'clock – a suitable time, it was considered for all parties; convenient to Mrs Todgers, on account of the bakers; and convenient to the gentlemen with reference to their afternoon engagements. But on the Sunday which was to introduce the two Miss Pecksniffs to a full knowledge of Todgers's and its society, the dinner was postponed until five, in order that everything might be as genteel as the occasion demanded.

When the hour drew nigh, Bailey junior, testifying great excitement, appeared in a complete suit of cast-off clothes several sizes too large for him, and in particular, mounted a clean shirt of such extraordinary magnitude, that one of the gentlemen (remarkable for his ready wit) called him 'collars' on the spot. At about a quarter before five, a deputation, consisting of Mr Jinkins, and another gentleman, whose name was Gander, knocked at the door of Mrs Todgers's room, and, being formally introduced to the two Miss Pecksniffs by their parent who was in waiting, besought the honour of conducting them upstairs.

The drawing-room at Todgers's was out of the common style; so much so indeed, that you would hardly have taken it to be a drawingroom, unless you were told so by somebody who was in the secret. It was floor-clothed all over; and the ceiling, including a great beam in the middle, was papered. Besides the three little windows, with seats in them, commanding the opposite archway, there was another window looking point blank, without any compromise at all about it into Jinkins's bedroom; and high up, all along one side of the wall was a strip of panes of glass, two-deep, giving light to the staircase. There were the oddest closets possible, with little casements in them like eight-day clocks, lurking in the wainscot and taking the shape of the stairs; and the very door itself (which was painted black) had two great glass eyes in its forehead, with an inquisitive green pupil in the middle of each.

Here the gentlemen were all assembled. There was a general cry of 'Hear, hear!' and 'Bravo Jink!' when Mr Jinkins appeared with Charity on his arm; which became quite rapturous as Mr Gander followed, escorting Mercy, and Mr Pecksniff brought up the rear with Mrs Todgers.

Then the presentations took place. They included a gentleman of a sporting turn, who propounded questions on jockey subjects to the editors of Sunday papers, which were regarded by his friends as rather stiff things to answer; and they included a gentleman of a theatrical turn, who had once entertained serious thoughts of 'coming out,' but had been kept in by the wickedness of human nature; and they included a gentleman of a debating turn, who was strong at speech-making; and a gentleman of a literary turn, who wrote squibs upon the rest, and knew the weak side of everybody's character but his own. There was a gentleman of a vocal turn, and a gentleman of a smoking turn, and a gentleman of a convivial turn; some of the gentlemen had a turn for whist, and a large proportion of the gentlemen had a strong turn for billiards and betting. They had all, it may be presumed, a turn for business; being all commercially employed in one way or other; and had, every one in his own way, a decided turn for pleasure to boot. Mr Jinkins was of a fashionable turn; being a regular frequenter of the Parks on Sundays, and knowing a great many carriages by sight. He spoke mysteriously, too, of splendid women, and was suspected of having once committed himself with a Countess. Mr Gander was of a witty turn being indeed the gentleman who had originated the sally about 'collars;' which sparkling pleasantry was now retailed from mouth to mouth, under the title of Gander's Last, and was received in all parts of the room with great applause. Mr Jinkins it may be added, was much the oldest of the party; being a fish-salesman's book-keeper, aged forty. He was the oldest boarder also; and in right of his double seniority, took the lead in the house, as Mrs Todgers had already said.

There was considerable delay in the production of dinner, and poor Mrs Todgers, being reproached in confidence by Jinkins, slipped in and out, at least twenty times to see about it; always coming back as though she had no such thing upon her mind, and hadn't been out at all. But there was no hitch in the conversation nevertheless; for one gentleman, who travelled in the perfumery line, exhibited an interesting nick-nack, in the way of a remarkable cake of shaving soap which he had lately met with in Germany; and the gentleman of a literary turn repeated (by desire) some

sarcastic stanzas he had recently produced on the freezing of the tank at the back of the house. These amusements, with the miscellaneous conversation arising out of them, passed the time splendidly, until dinner was announced by Bailey junior in these terms:

'The wittles is up!'

On which notice they immediately descended to the banquet-hall; some of the more facetious spirits in the rear taking down gentlemen as if they were ladies, in imitation of the fortunate possessors of the two Miss Pecksniffs.

Mr Pecksniff said grace – a short and pious grace, involving a blessing on the appetites of those present, and committing all persons who had nothing to eat, to the care of Providence; whose business (so said the grace, in effect) it clearly was, to look after them. This done, they fell to with less ceremony than appetite; the table groaning beneath the weight, not only of the delicacies whereof the Miss Pecksniffs had been previously forewarned, but of boiled beef, roast veal, bacon, pies and abundance of such heavy vegetables as are favourably known to housekeepers for their satisfying qualities. Besides which, there were bottles of stout, bottles of wine, bottles of ale, and divers other strong drinks, native and foreign.

All this was highly agreeable to the two Miss Pecksniffs, who were in immense request; sitting one on either hand of Mr Jinkins at the bottom of the table; and who were called upon to take wine with some new admirer every minute. They had hardly ever felt so pleasant, and so full of conversation, in their lives; Mercy, in particular, was uncommonly brilliant, and said so many good things in the way of lively repartee that she was looked upon as a prodigy. 'In short,' as that young lady observed, 'they felt now, indeed, that they were in London, and for the first time too.'

Their young friend Bailey sympathized in these feelings to the fullest extent, and, abating nothing of his patronage, gave them every encouragement in his power; favouring them, when the general attention was diverted from his proceedings, with many nods and winks and other tokens of recognition, and occasionally touching his nose with a corkscrew, as if to express the Bacchanalian character of the meeting. In truth, perhaps even the spirits of the two Miss Pecksniffs, and the hungry watchfulness of Mrs Todgers, were less worthy of note than the proceedings of this remarkable boy, whom nothing disconcerted or put out of his way. If any piece of crockery, a dish or otherwise, chanced to slip through his hands (which happened once or twice), he let it go with perfect good breeding, and never added to the painful emotions of the company by exhibiting the least regret. Nor did he, by hurrying to and fro, disturb the repose of the assembly, as many well-trained servants do; on the contrary, feeling the hopelessness of waiting upon so large a party, he left the gentlemen to help themselves to what they wanted, and seldom stirred from behind Mr Jinkins's chair, where, with his hands in his pockets, and his legs planted pretty wide apart, he led the laughter, and enjoyed the conversation.

The dessert was splendid. No waiting either. The pudding-plates had been washed in a little tub outside the door while cheese was on, and though they were moist and warm with friction, still there they were again, up to the mark, and true to time. Quarts of almonds; dozens of oranges; pounds of raisins; stacks of biffins; soup-plates full of nuts. – Oh, Todgers's could do it when it chose! mind that.

Then more wine came on; red wines and white wines; and a large china bowl of punch, brewed by the gentleman of a convivial turn, who adjured the Miss Pecksniffs not to be despondent on account of its dimensions, as there were materials in the house for the decoction of half a dozen more of the same size. Good gracious, how they laughed! How they coughed when they sipped it, because it was so strong; and how they laughed again when somebody vowed that but for its colour it might have been mistaken, in regard of its innocuous qualities, for new milk! What a shout of 'No!' burst from the gentlemen when they pathetically implored Mr Jinkins to suffer them to qualify it with hot water; and how blushingly, by little and little, did each of them drink her whole glassful, down to its very dregs!

Now comes the trying time. The sun, as Mr Jinkins says (gentlemanly creature, Jinkins – never at a loss!), is about to leave the firmament. 'Miss Pecksniff!' says Mrs Todgers, softly, 'will you – ?'

'Oh dear, no more, Mrs Todgers.' Mrs Todgers rises; the two Miss Pecksniffs rise; all rise. Miss Mercy Pecksniff looks downward for her scarf. Where is it? Dear me, where *can* it be? Sweet girl, she has it on; not on her fair neck, but loose upon her flowing figure. A dozen hands assist her. She is all confusion. The youngest gentleman in company thirsts to murder Jinkins. She skips and joins her sister at the door. Her sister has her arm about the waist of Mrs Todgers. She winds her arm around her sister. Diana, what a picture! The last things visible are a shape and a skip. 'Gentlemen, let us drink the ladies!'

The enthusiasm is tremendous. The gentleman of a debating turn rises in the midst, and suddenly lets loose a tide of eloquence which bears down everything before it. He is reminded of a toast – a toast to which they will respond. There is an individual present; he has him in his eye; to whom they owe a debt of gratitude. He repeats it – a debt of gratitude. Their rugged natures have been softened and ameliorated that day, by the society of lovely woman. There is a gentleman in company whom two accomplished and delightful females regard with veneration, as the fountain of their existence. Yes, when yet the two Miss Pecksniffs lisped in language scarce intelligible, they called that individual 'Father!' There is great applause. He gives them 'Mr Pecksniff, and God bless him!' They all shake hands with Mr Pecksniff, as they drink the toast. The youngest gentleman in company does so with a thrill; for he feels that a mysterious influence pervades the man who claims that being in the pink scarf for his daughter.

What saith Mr Pecksniff in reply? Or rather let the question be, What leaves he unsaid? Nothing. More punch is called for, and produced, and drunk. Enthusiasm mounts still higher. Every man comes out freely in his own character. The gentleman of a theatrical turn recites. The vocal gentleman regales them with a song. Gander leaves the Gander of all former feasts whole leagues behind. *he* rises to propose a toast. It is, The Father of Todgers's. It is their common friend Jink – it is old Jink, if he may call him by that familiar and endearing appellation. The youngest gentleman in company utters a frantic negative. He won't have it – he can't bear it – it mustn't be. But his depth of feeling is misunderstood. He is supposed to be a little elevated; and nobody heeds him.

Mr Jinkins thanks them from his heart. It is, by many degrees, the proudest day in his humble career. When he looks around him on the present occasion, he feels that he wants words in which to express his gratitude. One thing he will say. He hopes it has been shown that Todgers's can be true to itself; and that, an opportunity arising, it can come out quite as strong as its neighbours – perhaps stronger. He reminds them, amidst thunders of encouragement, that they have heard of a somewhat similar establishment in Cannon Street; and that they have heard it praised. He wishes to draw no invidious comparisons; he would be the last man to do it; but when that Cannon Street establishment shall be able to produce such a combination of wit and beauty as has graced that board that day, and shall be able to serve up (all things considered) such a dinner as that of which they have just partaken, he will be happy to talk to it. Until then, gentlemen, he will stick to Todgers's.

More punch, more enthusiasm, more speeches. Everybody's health is drunk, saving the youngest gentleman's in company. He sits apart, with his elbow on the back of a vacant chair, and glares disdainfully at Jinkins. Gander, in a convulsing speech, gives them the health of Bailey junior; hiccups are heard; and a glass is broken. Mr Jinkins feels that it is time to join the ladies. He proposes, as a final sentiment, Mrs Todgers. She is worthy to be remembered separately. Hear, hear. So she is; no doubt of it. They all find fault with her at other times; but every man feels now, that he could die in her defence.

They go upstairs, where they are not expected so soon; for Mrs Todgers is asleep, Miss Charity is adjusting her hair, and Mercy, who has made a sofa of one of the window-seats is in a gracefully recumbent attitude. She is rising hastily, when Mr Jinkins implores her, for all their sakes, not to stir; she looks too graceful and too lovely, he remarks, to be disturbed. She laughs, and yields, and fans herself, and drops her fan, and there is a rush to pick it up. Being now installed, by one consent, as the beauty of the party, she is cruel and capricious, and sends gentlemen on messages to other gentlemen,

and forgets all about them before they can return with the answer, and invents a thousand tortures, rending their hearts to pieces. Bailey brings up the tea and coffee. There is a small cluster of admirers round Charity; but they are only those who cannot get near her sister. The youngest gentleman in company is pale, but collected, and still sits apart; for his spirit loves to hold communion with itself, and his soul recoils from noisy revellers. She has a consciousness of his presence and adoration. He sees it flashing sometimes in the corner of her eye. Have a care, Jinkins, ere you provoke a desperate man to frenzy!

Mr Pecksniff had followed his younger friends upstairs, and taken a chair at the side of Mrs Todgers. He had also spilt a cup of coffee over his legs without appearing to be aware of the circumstance; nor did he seem to know that there was muffin on his knee.

'And how have they used you downstairs, sir?' asked the hostess.

'Their conduct has been such, my dear madam,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'as I can never think of without emotion, or remember without a tear. Oh, Mrs Todgers!'

'My goodness!' exclaimed that lady. 'How low you are in your spirits, sir!'

'I am a man, my dear madam,' said Mr Pecksniff, shedding tears and speaking with an imperfect articulation, 'but I am also a father. I am also a widower. My feelings, Mrs Todgers, will not consent to be entirely smothered, like the young children in the Tower. They are grown up, and the more I press the bolster on them, the more they look round the corner of it.'

He suddenly became conscious of the bit of muffin, and stared at it intently; shaking his head the while, in a forlorn and imbecile manner, as if he regarded it as his evil genius, and mildly reproached it.

'She was beautiful, Mrs Todgers,' he said, turning his glazed eye again upon her, without the least preliminary notice. 'She had a small property.'

'So I have heard,' cried Mrs Todgers with great sympathy.

'Those are her daughters,' said Mr Pecksniff, pointing out the young ladies, with increased emotion.

Mrs Todgers had no doubt about it.

'Mercy and Charity,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'Charity and Mercy. Not unholy names, I hope?'

'Mr Pecksniff!' cried Mrs Todgers. 'What a ghastly smile! Are you ill, sir?'

He pressed his hand upon her arm, and answered in a solemn manner, and a faint voice, 'Chronic.'

'Cholic?' cried the frightened Mrs Todgers.

'Chron-ic,' he repeated with some difficulty. 'Chron-ic. A chronic disorder. I have been its victim from childhood. It is carrying me to my grave.'

'Heaven forbid!' cried Mrs Todgers.

'Yes, it is,' said Mr Pecksniff, reckless with despair. 'I am rather glad of it, upon the whole. You are like her, Mrs Todgers.'

'Don't squeeze me so tight, pray, Mr Pecksniff. If any of the gentlemen should notice us.'

'For her sake,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Permit me – in honour of her memory. For the sake of a voice from the tomb. You are *very* like her Mrs Todgers! What a world this is!'

'Ah! Indeed you may say that!' cried Mrs Todgers.

'I'm afraid it is a vain and thoughtless world,' said Mr Pecksniff, overflowing with despondency. 'These young people about us. Oh! what sense have they of their responsibilities? None. Give me your other hand, Mrs Todgers.'

The lady hesitated, and said 'she didn't like.'

'Has a voice from the grave no influence?' said Mr Pecksniff, with, dismal tenderness. 'This is irreligious! My dear creature.'

'Hush!' urged Mrs Todgers. 'Really you mustn't.'

'It's not me,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Don't suppose it's me; it's the voice; it's her voice.'

Mrs Pecksniff deceased, must have had an unusually thick and husky voice for a lady, and rather a stuttering voice, and to say the truth somewhat of a drunken voice, if it had ever borne much resemblance to that in which Mr Pecksniff spoke just then. But perhaps this was delusion on his part.

'It has been a day of enjoyment, Mrs Todgers, but still it has been a day of torture. It has reminded me of my loneliness. What am I in the world?'

'An excellent gentleman, Mr Pecksniff,' said Mrs Todgers.

'There is consolation in that too,' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'Am I?'

'There is no better man living,' said Mrs Todgers, 'I am sure.'

Mr Pecksniff smiled through his tears, and slightly shook his head. 'You are very good,' he said, 'thank you. It is a great happiness to me, Mrs Todgers, to make young people happy. The happiness of my pupils is my chief object. I dote upon 'em. They dote upon me too – sometimes.'

'Always,' said Mrs Todgers.

'When they say they haven't improved, ma'am,' whispered Mr Pecksniff, looking at her with profound mystery, and motioning to her to advance her ear a little closer to his mouth. 'When they say they haven't improved, ma'am, and the premium was too high, they lie! I shouldn't wish it to be mentioned; you will understand me; but I say to you as to an old friend, they lie.'

'Base wretches they must be!' said Mrs Todgers.

'Madam,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'you are right. I respect you for that observation. A word in your ear. To Parents and Guardians. This is in confidence, Mrs Todgers?'

'The strictest, of course!' cried that lady.

'To Parents and Guardians,' repeated Mr Pecksniff. 'An eligible opportunity now offers, which unites the advantages of the best practical architectural education with the comforts of a home, and the constant association with some, who, however humble their sphere and limited their capacity – observe! – are not unmindful of their moral responsibilities.'

Mrs Todgers looked a little puzzled to know what this might mean, as well she might; for it was, as the reader may perchance remember, Mr Pecksniff's usual form of advertisement when he wanted a pupil; and seemed to have no particular reference, at present, to anything. But Mr Pecksniff held up his finger as a caution to her not to interrupt him.

'Do you know any parent or guardian, Mrs Todgers,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'who desires to avail himself of such an opportunity for a young gentleman? An orphan would be preferred. Do you know of any orphan with three or four hundred pound?'

Mrs Todgers reflected, and shook her head.

'When you hear of an orphan with three or four hundred pound,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'let that dear orphan's friends apply, by letter post-paid, to S. P., Post Office, Salisbury. I don't know who he is exactly. Don't be alarmed, Mrs Todgers,' said Mr Pecksniff, falling heavily against her; 'Chronic – chronic! Let's have a little drop of something to drink.'

'Bless my life, Miss Pecksniffs!' cried Mrs Todgers, aloud, 'your dear pa's took very poorly!'

Mr Pecksniff straightened himself by a surprising effort, as every one turned hastily towards him; and standing on his feet, regarded the assembly with a look of ineffable wisdom. Gradually it gave place to a smile; a feeble, helpless, melancholy smile; bland, almost to sickliness. 'Do not repine, my friends,' said Mr Pecksniff, tenderly. 'Do not weep for me. It is chronic.' And with these words, after making a futile attempt to pull off his shoes, he fell into the fireplace.

The youngest gentleman in company had him out in a second. Yes, before a hair upon his head was singed, he had him on the hearth-rug – her father!

She was almost beside herself. So was her sister. Jinkins consoled them both. They all consoled them. Everybody had something to say, except the youngest gentleman in company, who with a noble self-devotion did the heavy work, and held up Mr Pecksniff's head without being taken notice of by anybody. At last they gathered round, and agreed to carry him upstairs to bed. The youngest gentleman in company was rebuked by Jinkins for tearing Mr Pecksniff's coat! Ha, ha! But no matter.

They carried him upstairs, and crushed the youngest gentleman at every step. His bedroom was at the top of the house, and it was a long way; but they got him there in course of time. He asked them frequently on the road for a little drop of something to drink. It seemed an idiosyncrasy. The youngest gentleman in company proposed a draught of water. Mr Pecksniff called him opprobious names for the suggestion.

Jinkins and Gander took the rest upon themselves, and made him as comfortable as they could, on the outside of his bed; and when he seemed disposed to sleep, they left him. But before they had all gained the bottom of the staircase, a vision of Mr Pecksniff, strangely attired, was seen to flutter on the top landing. He desired to collect their sentiments, it seemed, upon the nature of human life.

'My friends,' cried Mr Pecksniff, looking over the banisters, 'let us improve our minds by mutual inquiry and discussion. Let us be moral. Let us contemplate existence. Where is Jinkins?'

'Here,' cried that gentleman. 'Go to bed again'

'To bed!' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Bed! 'Tis the voice of the sluggard, I hear him complain, you have woke me too soon, I must slumber again. If any young orphan will repeat the remainder of that simple piece from Doctor Watts's collection, an eligible opportunity now offers.'

Nobody volunteered.

'This is very soothing,' said Mr Pecksniff, after a pause. 'Extremely so. Cool and refreshing; particularly to the legs! The legs of the human subject, my friends, are a beautiful production. Compare them with wooden legs, and observe the difference between the anatomy of nature and the anatomy of art. Do you know,' said Mr Pecksniff, leaning over the banisters, with an odd recollection of his familiar manner among new pupils at home, 'that I should very much like to see Mrs Todgers's notion of a wooden leg, if perfectly agreeable to herself!'

As it appeared impossible to entertain any reasonable hopes of him after this speech, Mr Jinkins and Mr Gander went upstairs again, and once more got him into bed. But they had not descended to the second floor before he was out again; nor, when they had repeated the process, had they descended the first flight, before he was out again. In a word, as often as he was shut up in his own room, he darted out afresh, charged with some new moral sentiment, which he continually repeated over the banisters, with extraordinary relish, and an irrepressible desire for the improvement of his fellow creatures that nothing could subdue.

Under these circumstances, when they had got him into bed for the thirtieth time or so, Mr Jinkins held him, while his companion went downstairs in search of Bailey junior, with whom he presently returned. That youth having been apprised of the service required of him, was in great spirits, and brought up a stool, a candle, and his supper; to the end that he might keep watch outside the bedroom door with tolerable comfort.

When he had completed his arrangements, they locked Mr Pecksniff in, and left the key on the outside; charging the young page to listen attentively for symptoms of an apoplectic nature, with which the patient might be troubled, and, in case of any such presenting themselves, to summon them without delay. To which Mr Bailey modestly replied that 'he hoped he knowed wot o'clock it wos in gineral, and didn't date his letters to his friends from Todgers's for nothing.'

CHAPTER TEN

CONTAINING STRANGE MATTER, ON WHICH MANY EVENTS IN THIS HISTORY MAY, FOR THEIR GOOD OR EVIL INFLUENCE, CHIEFLY DEPEND

But Mr Pecksniff came to town on business. Had he forgotten that? Was he always taking his pleasure with Todgers's jovial brood, unmindful of the serious demands, whatever they might be, upon his calm consideration? No.

Time and tide will wait for no man, saith the adage. But all men have to wait for time and tide. That tide which, taken at the flood, would lead Seth Pecksniff on to fortune, was marked down in the table, and about to flow. No idle Pecksniff lingered far inland, unmindful of the changes of the stream; but there, upon the water's edge, over his shoes already, stood the worthy creature, prepared to wallow in the very mud, so that it slid towards the quarter of his hope.

The trustfulness of his two fair daughters was beautiful indeed. They had that firm reliance on their parent's nature, which taught them to feel certain that in all he did he had his purpose straight and full before him. And that its noble end and object was himself, which almost of necessity included them, they knew. The devotion of these maids was perfect.

Their filial confidence was rendered the more touching, by their having no knowledge of their parent's real designs, in the present instance. All that they knew of his proceedings was, that every morning, after the early breakfast, he repaired to the post office and inquired for letters. That task performed, his business for the day was over; and he again relaxed, until the rising of another sun proclaimed the advent of another post.

This went on for four or five days. At length, one morning, Mr Pecksniff returned with a breathless rapidity, strange to observe in him, at other times so calm; and, seeking immediate speech with his daughters, shut himself up with them in private conference for two whole hours. Of all that passed in this period, only the following words of Mr Pecksniff's utterance are known:

'How he has come to change so very much (if it should turn out as I expect, that he has), we needn't stop to inquire. My dears, I have my thoughts upon the subject, but I will not impart them. It is enough that we will not be proud, resentful, or unforgiving. If he wants our friendship he shall have it. We know our duty, I hope!'

That same day at noon, an old gentleman alighted from a hackney-coach at the post-office, and, giving his name, inquired for a letter addressed to himself, and directed to be left till called for. It had been lying there some days. The superscription was in Mr Pecksniff's hand, and it was sealed with Mr Pecksniff's seal.

It was very short, containing indeed nothing more than an address 'with Mr Pecksniff's respectful, and (not withstanding what has passed) sincerely affectionate regards.' The old gentleman tore off the direction – scattering the rest in fragments to the winds – and giving it to the coachman, bade him drive as near that place as he could. In pursuance of these instructions he was driven to the Monument; where he again alighted, and dismissed the vehicle, and walked towards Todgers's.

Though the face, and form, and gait of this old man, and even his grip of the stout stick on which he leaned, were all expressive of a resolution not easily shaken, and a purpose (it matters little whether right or wrong, just now) such as in other days might have survived the rack, and had its strongest life in weakest death; still there were grains of hesitation in his mind, which made him now avoid the house he sought, and loiter to and fro in a gleam of sunlight, that brightened the little churchyard hard by. There may have been, in the presence of those idle heaps of dust among the busiest stir of life, something to increase his wavering; but there he walked, awakening the echoes as he paced up and down, until the church clock, striking the quarters for the second time since he

had been there, roused him from his meditation. Shaking off his incertitude as the air parted with the sound of the bells, he walked rapidly to the house, and knocked at the door.

Mr Pecksniff was seated in the landlady's little room, and his visitor found him reading – by an accident; he apologised for it – an excellent theological work. There were cake and wine upon a little table – by another accident, for which he also apologised. Indeed he said, he had given his visitor up, and was about to partake of that simple refreshment with his children, when he knocked at the door.

'Your daughters are well?' said old Martin, laying down his hat and stick.

Mr Pecksniff endeavoured to conceal his agitation as a father when he answered Yes, they were. They were good girls, he said, very good. He would not venture to recommend Mr Chuzzlewit to take the easy-chair, or to keep out of the draught from the door. If he made any such suggestion, he would expose himself, he feared, to most unjust suspicion. He would, therefore, content himself with remarking that there was an easy-chair in the room, and that the door was far from being air-tight. This latter imperfection, he might perhaps venture to add, was not uncommonly to be met with in old houses.

The old man sat down in the easy-chair, and after a few moments' silence, said:

'In the first place, let me thank you for coming to London so promptly, at my almost unexplained request; I need scarcely add, at my cost.'

'At *your* cost, my good sir!' cried Mr Pecksniff, in a tone of great surprise.

'It is not,' said Martin, waving his hand impatiently, 'my habit to put my – well! my relatives – to any personal expense to gratify my caprices.'

'Caprices, my good sir!' cried Mr Pecksniff

'That is scarcely the proper word either, in this instance,' said the old man. 'No. You are right.'

Mr Pecksniff was inwardly very much relieved to hear it, though he didn't at all know why.

'You are right,' repeated Martin. 'It is not a caprice. It is built up on reason, proof, and cool comparison. Caprices never are. Moreover, I am not a capricious man. I never was.'

'Most assuredly not,' said Mr Pecksniff.

'How do you know?' returned the other quickly. 'You are to begin to know it now. You are to test and prove it, in time to come. You and yours are to find that I can be constant, and am not to be diverted from my end. Do you hear?'

'Perfectly,' said Mr Pecksniff.

'I very much regret,' Martin resumed, looking steadily at him, and speaking in a slow and measured tone; 'I very much regret that you and I held such a conversation together, as that which passed between us at our last meeting. I very much regret that I laid open to you what were then my thoughts of you, so freely as I did. The intentions that I bear towards you now are of another kind; deserted by all in whom I have ever trusted; hoodwinked and beset by all who should help and sustain me; I fly to you for refuge. I confide in you to be my ally; to attach yourself to me by ties of Interest and Expectation' – he laid great stress upon these words, though Mr Pecksniff particularly begged him not to mention it; 'and to help me to visit the consequences of the very worst species of meanness, dissimulation, and subtlety, on the right heads.'

'My noble sir!' cried Mr Pecksniff, catching at his outstretched hand. 'And *you* regret the having harboured unjust thoughts of me! *you* with those grey hairs!'

'Regrets,' said Martin, 'are the natural property of grey hairs; and I enjoy, in common with all other men, at least my share of such inheritance. And so enough of that. I regret having been severed from you so long. If I had known you sooner, and sooner used you as you well deserve, I might have been a happier man.'

Mr Pecksniff looked up to the ceiling, and clasped his hands in rapture.

'Your daughters,' said Martin, after a short silence. 'I don't know them. Are they like you?'

'In the nose of my eldest and the chin of my youngest, Mr Chuzzlewit,' returned the widower, 'their sainted parent (not myself, their mother) lives again.'

'I don't mean in person,' said the old man. 'Morally, morally.'

"Tis not for me to say,' retorted Mr Pecksniff with a gentle smile. 'I have done my best, sir.'

'I could wish to see them,' said Martin; 'are they near at hand?'

They were, very near; for they had in fact been listening at the door from the beginning of this conversation until now, when they precipitately retired. Having wiped the signs of weakness from his eyes, and so given them time to get upstairs, Mr Pecksniff opened the door, and mildly cried in the passage,

'My own darlings, where are you?'

'Here, my dear pa!' replied the distant voice of Charity.

'Come down into the back parlour, if you please, my love,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'and bring your sister with you.'

'Yes, my dear pa,' cried Merry; and down they came directly (being all obedience), singing as they came.

Nothing could exceed the astonishment of the two Miss Pecksniffs when they found a stranger with their dear papa. Nothing could surpass their mute amazement when he said, 'My children, Mr Chuzzlewit!' But when he told them that Mr Chuzzlewit and he were friends, and that Mr Chuzzlewit had said such kind and tender words as pierced his very heart, the two Miss Pecksniffs cried with one accord, 'Thank Heaven for this!' and fell upon the old man's neck. And when they had embraced him with such fervour of affection that no words can describe it, they grouped themselves about his chair, and hung over him, as figuring to themselves no earthly joy like that of ministering to his wants, and crowding into the remainder of his life, the love they would have diffused over their whole existence, from infancy, if he – dear obdurate! – had but consented to receive the precious offering.

The old man looked attentively from one to the other, and then at Mr Pecksniff, several times.

'What,' he asked of Mr Pecksniff, happening to catch his eye in its descent; for until now it had been piously upraised, with something of that expression which the poetry of ages has attributed to a domestic bird, when breathing its last amid the ravages of an electric storm: 'What are their names?'

Mr Pecksniff told him, and added, rather hastily; his caluminators would have said, with a view to any testamentary thoughts that might be flitting through old Martin's mind; 'Perhaps, my dears, you had better write them down. Your humble autographs are of no value in themselves, but affection may prize them.'

'Affection,' said the old man, 'will expend itself on the living originals. Do not trouble yourselves, my girls, I shall not so easily forget you, Charity and Mercy, as to need such tokens of remembrance. Cousin!'

'Sir!' said Mr Pecksniff, with alacrity.

'Do you never sit down?'

'Why – yes – occasionally, sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, who had been standing all this time.

'Will you do so now?'

'Can you ask me,' returned Mr Pecksniff, slipping into a chair immediately, 'whether I will do anything that you desire?'

'You talk confidently,' said Martin, 'and you mean well; but I fear you don't know what an old man's humours are. You don't know what it is to be required to court his likings and dislikings; to adapt yourself to his prejudices; to do his bidding, be it what it may; to bear with his distrusts and jealousies; and always still be zealous in his service. When I remember how numerous these failings are in me, and judge of their occasional enormity by the injurious thoughts I lately entertained of you, I hardly dare to claim you for my friend.'

'My worthy sir,' returned his relative, 'how *can* you talk in such a painful strain! What was more natural than that you should make one slight mistake, when in all other respects you were so very correct, and have had such reason – such very sad and undeniable reason – to judge of every one about you in the worst light!'

'True,' replied the other. 'You are very lenient with me.'

'We always said, my girls and I,' cried Mr Pecksniff with increasing obsequiousness, 'that while we mourned the heaviness of our misfortune in being confounded with the base and mercenary, still we could not wonder at it. My dears, you remember?'

Oh vividly! A thousand times!

'We uttered no complaint,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Occasionally we had the presumption to console ourselves with the remark that Truth would in the end prevail, and Virtue be triumphant; but not often. My loves, you recollect?'

Recollect! Could he doubt it! Dearest pa, what strange unnecessary questions!

'And when I saw you,' resumed Mr Pecksniff, with still greater deference, 'in the little, unassuming village where we take the liberty of dwelling, I said you were mistaken in me, my dear sir; that was all, I think?'

'No – not all,' said Martin, who had been sitting with his hand upon his brow for some time past, and now looked up again; 'you said much more, which, added to other circumstances that have come to my knowledge, opened my eyes. You spoke to me, disinterestedly, on behalf of – I needn't name him. You know whom I mean.'

Trouble was expressed in Mr Pecksniff's visage, as he pressed his hot hands together, and replied, with humility, 'Quite disinterestedly, sir, I assure you.'

'I know it,' said old Martin, in his quiet way. 'I am sure of it. I said so. It was disinterested too, in you, to draw that herd of harpies off from me, and be their victim yourself; most other men would have suffered them to display themselves in all their rapacity, and would have striven to rise, by contrast, in my estimation. You felt for me, and drew them off, for which I owe you many thanks. Although I left the place, I know what passed behind my back, you see!'

'You amaze me, sir!' cried Mr Pecksniff; which was true enough.

'My knowledge of your proceedings,' said the old man, does not stop at this. You have a new inmate in your house.'

'Yes, sir,' rejoined the architect, 'I have.'

'He must quit it' said Martin.

'For – for yours?' asked Mr Pecksniff, with a quavering mildness.

'For any shelter he can find,' the old man answered. 'He has deceived you.'

'I hope not' said Mr Pecksniff, eagerly. 'I trust not. I have been extremely well disposed towards that young man. I hope it cannot be shown that he has forfeited all claim to my protection. Deceit – deceit, my dear Mr Chuzzlewit, would be final. I should hold myself bound, on proof of deceit, to renounce him instantly.'

The old man glanced at both his fair supporters, but especially at Miss Mercy, whom, indeed, he looked full in the face, with a greater demonstration of interest than had yet appeared in his features. His gaze again encountered Mr Pecksniff, as he said, composedly:

'Of course you know that he has made his matrimonial choice?'

'Oh dear!' cried Mr Pecksniff, rubbing his hair up very stiff upon his head, and staring wildly at his daughters. 'This is becoming tremendous!'

'You know the fact?' repeated Martin

'Surely not without his grandfather's consent and approbation my dear sir!' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'Don't tell me that. For the honour of human nature, say you're not about to tell me that!'

'I thought he had suppressed it,' said the old man.

The indignation felt by Mr Pecksniff at this terrible disclosure, was only to be equalled by the kindling anger of his daughters. What! Had they taken to their hearth and home a secretly contracted serpent; a crocodile, who had made a furtive offer of his hand; an imposition on society; a bankrupt bachelor with no effects, trading with the spinster world on false pretences! And oh, to think that he should have disobeyed and practised on that sweet, that venerable gentleman, whose name he

bore; that kind and tender guardian; his more than father – to say nothing at all of mother – horrible, horrible! To turn him out with ignominy would be treatment much too good. Was there nothing else that could be done to him? Had he incurred no legal pains and penalties? Could it be that the statutes of the land were so remiss as to have affixed no punishment to such delinquency? Monster; how basely had they been deceived!

'I am glad to find you second me so warmly,' said the old man holding up his hand to stay the torrent of their wrath. 'I will not deny that it is a pleasure to me to find you so full of zeal. We will consider that topic as disposed of.'

'No, my dear sir,' cried Mr Pecksniff, 'not as disposed of, until I have purged my house of this pollution.'

'That will follow,' said the old man, 'in its own time. I look upon that as done.'

'You are very good, sir,' answered Mr Pecksniff, shaking his hand. 'You do me honour. You *may* look upon it as done, I assure you.'

'There is another topic,' said Martin, 'on which I hope you will assist me. You remember Mary, cousin?'

'The young lady that I mentioned to you, my dears, as having interested me so very much,' remarked Mr Pecksniff. 'Excuse my interrupting you, sir.'

'I told you her history?' said the old man.

'Which I also mentioned, you will recollect, my dears,' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'Silly girls, Mr Chuzzlewit – quite moved by it, they were!'

'Why, look now!' said Martin, evidently pleased; 'I feared I should have had to urge her case upon you, and ask you to regard her favourably for my sake. But I find you have no jealousies! Well! You have no cause for any, to be sure. She has nothing to gain from me, my dears, and she knows it.'

The two Miss Pecksniffs murmured their approval of this wise arrangement, and their cordial sympathy with its interesting object.

'If I could have anticipated what has come to pass between us four,' said the old man thoughfully; 'but it is too late to think of that. You would receive her courteously, young ladies, and be kind to her, if need were?'

Where was the orphan whom the two Miss Pecksniffs would not have cherished in their sisterly bosom! But when that orphan was commended to their care by one on whom the dammed-up love of years was gushing forth, what exhaustless stores of pure affection yearned to expend themselves upon her!

An interval ensued, during which Mr Chuzzlewit, in an absent frame of mind, sat gazing at the ground, without uttering a word; and as it was plain that he had no desire to be interrupted in his meditations, Mr Pecksniff and his daughters were profoundly silent also. During the whole of the foregoing dialogue, he had borne his part with a cold, passionless promptitude, as though he had learned and painfully rehearsed it all a hundred times. Even when his expressions were warmest and his language most encouraging, he had retained the same manner, without the least abatement. But now there was a keener brightness in his eye, and more expression in his voice, as he said, awakening from his thoughtful mood:

'You know what will be said of this? Have you reflected?'

'Said of what, my dear sir?' Mr Pecksniff asked.

'Of this new understanding between us.'

Mr Pecksniff looked benevolently sagacious, and at the same time far above all earthly misconstruction, as he shook his head, and observed that a great many things would be said of it, no doubt.

'A great many,' rejoined the old man. 'Some will say that I dote in my old age; that illness has shaken me; that I have lost all strength of mind, and have grown childish. You can bear that?'

Mr Pecksniff answered that it would be dreadfully hard to bear, but he thought he could, if he made a great effort.

'Others will say – I speak of disappointed, angry people only – that you have lied and fawned, and wormed yourself through dirty ways into my favour; by such concessions and such crooked deeds, such meannesses and vile endurances, as nothing could repay; no, not the legacy of half the world we live in. You can bear that?'

Mr Pecksniff made reply that this would be also very hard to bear, as reflecting, in some degree, on the discernment of Mr Chuzzlewit. Still he had a modest confidence that he could sustain the calumny, with the help of a good conscience, and that gentleman's friendship.

'With the great mass of slanderers,' said old Martin, leaning back in his chair, 'the tale, as I clearly foresee, will run thus: That to mark my contempt for the rabble whom I despised, I chose from among them the very worst, and made him do my will, and pampered and enriched him at the cost of all the rest. That, after casting about for the means of a punishment which should rankle in the bosoms of these kites the most, and strike into their gall, I devised this scheme at a time when the last link in the chain of grateful love and duty, that held me to my race, was roughly snapped asunder; roughly, for I loved him well; roughly, for I had ever put my trust in his affection; roughly, for that he broke it when I loved him most – God help me! – and he without a pang could throw me off, while I clung about his heart! Now,' said the old man, dismissing this passionate outburst as suddenly as he had yielded to it, 'is your mind made up to bear this likewise? Lay your account with having it to bear, and put no trust in being set right by me.'

'My dear Mr Chuzzlewit,' cried Pecksniff in an ecstasy, 'for such a man as you have shown yourself to be this day; for a man so injured, yet so very humane; for a man so – I am at a loss what precise term to use – yet at the same time so remarkably – I don't know how to express my meaning; for such a man as I have described, I hope it is no presumption to say that I, and I am sure I may add my children also (my dears, we perfectly agree in this, I think?), would bear anything whatever!'

'Enough,' said Martin. 'You can charge no consequences on me. When do you retire home?'

'Whenever you please, my dear sir. To-night if you desire it.'

'I desire nothing,' returned the old man, 'that is unreasonable. Such a request would be. Will you be ready to return at the end of this week?'

The very time of all others that Mr Pecksniff would have suggested if it had been left to him to make his own choice. As to his daughters – the words, 'Let us be at home on Saturday, dear pa,' were actually upon their lips.

'Your expenses, cousin,' said Martin, taking a folded slip of paper from his pocketbook, 'may possibly exceed that amount. If so, let me know the balance that I owe you, when we next meet. It would be useless if I told you where I live just now; indeed, I have no fixed abode. When I have, you shall know it. You and your daughters may expect to see me before long; in the meantime I need not tell you that we keep our own confidence. What you will do when you get home is understood between us. Give me no account of it at any time; and never refer to it in any way. I ask that as a favour. I am commonly a man of few words, cousin; and all that need be said just now is said, I think.'

'One glass of wine – one morsel of this homely cake?' cried Mr Pecksniff, venturing to detain him. 'My dears – !'

The sisters flew to wait upon him.

'Poor girls!' said Mr Pecksniff. 'You will excuse their agitation, my dear sir. They are made up of feeling. A bad commodity to go through the world with, Mr Chuzzlewit! My youngest daughter is almost as much of a woman as my eldest, is she not, sir?'

'Which *is* the youngest?' asked the old man.

'Mercy, by five years,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'We sometimes venture to consider her rather a fine figure, sir. Speaking as an artist, I may perhaps be permitted to suggest that its outline is graceful and correct. I am naturally,' said Mr Pecksniff, drying his hands upon his handkerchief, and looking

anxiously in his cousin's face at almost every word, 'proud, if I may use the expression, to have a daughter who is constructed on the best models.'

'She seems to have a lively disposition,' observed Martin.

'Dear me!' said Mr Pecksniff. 'That is quite remarkable. You have defined her character, my dear sir, as correctly as if you had known her from her birth. She *has* a lively disposition. I assure you, my dear sir, that in our unpretending home her gaiety is delightful.'

'No doubt,' returned the old man.

'Charity, upon the other hand,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'is remarkable for strong sense, and for rather a deep tone of sentiment, if the partiality of a father may be excused in saying so. A wonderful affection between them, my dear sir! Allow me to drink your health. Bless you!'

'I little thought,' retorted Martin, 'but a month ago, that I should be breaking bread and pouring wine with you. I drink to you.'

Not at all abashed by the extraordinary abruptness with which these latter words were spoken, Mr Pecksniff thanked him devoutly.

'Now let me go,' said Martin, putting down the wine when he had merely touched it with his lips. 'My dears, good morning!'

But this distant form of farewell was by no means tender enough for the yearnings of the young ladies, who again embraced him with all their hearts – with all their arms at any rate – to which parting caresses their new-found friend submitted with a better grace than might have been expected from one who, not a moment before, had pledged their parent in such a very uncomfortable manner. These endearments terminated, he took a hasty leave of Mr Pecksniff and withdrew, followed to the door by both father and daughters, who stood there kissing their hands and beaming with affection until he disappeared; though, by the way, he never once looked back, after he had crossed the threshold.

When they returned into the house, and were again alone in Mrs Todgers's room, the two young ladies exhibited an unusual amount of gaiety; insomuch that they clapped their hands, and laughed, and looked with roguish aspects and a bantering air upon their dear papa. This conduct was so very unaccountable, that Mr Pecksniff (being singularly grave himself) could scarcely choose but ask them what it meant; and took them to task, in his gentle manner, for yielding to such light emotions.

'If it was possible to divine any cause for this merriment, even the most remote,' he said, 'I should not reprove you. But when you can have none whatever – oh, really, really!'

This admonition had so little effect on Mercy, that she was obliged to hold her handkerchief before her rosy lips, and to throw herself back in her chair, with every demonstration of extreme amusement; which want of duty so offended Mr Pecksniff that he reproved her in set terms, and gave her his parental advice to correct herself in solitude and contemplation. But at that juncture they were disturbed by the sound of voices in dispute; and as it proceeded from the next room, the subject matter of the altercation quickly reached their ears.

'I don't care that! Mrs Todgers,' said the young gentleman who had been the youngest gentleman in company on the day of the festival; 'I don't care *that*, ma'am,' said he, snapping his fingers, 'for Jinkins. Don't suppose I do.'

'I am quite certain you don't, sir,' replied Mrs Todgers. 'You have too independent a spirit, I know, to yield to anybody. And quite right. There is no reason why you should give way to any gentleman. Everybody must be well aware of that.'

'I should think no more of admitting daylight into the fellow,' said the youngest gentleman, in a desperate voice, 'than if he was a bulldog.'

Mrs Todgers did not stop to inquire whether, as a matter of principle, there was any particular reason for admitting daylight even into a bulldog, otherwise than by the natural channel of his eyes, but she seemed to wring her hands, and she moaned.

'Let him be careful,' said the youngest gentleman. 'I give him warning. No man shall step between me and the current of my vengeance. I know a Cove – ' he used that familiar epithet in his

agitation but corrected himself by adding, ‘a gentleman of property, I mean – who practices with a pair of pistols (fellows too) of his own. If I am driven to borrow ‘em, and to send at friend to Jinkins, a tragedy will get into the papers. That’s all.’

Again Mrs Todgers moaned.

‘I have borne this long enough,’ said the youngest gentleman but now my soul rebels against it, and I won’t stand it any longer. I left home originally, because I had that within me which wouldn’t be domineered over by a sister; and do you think I’m going to be put down by *him*? No.’

‘It is very wrong in Mr Jinkins; I know it is perfectly inexcusable in Mr Jinkins, if he intends it,’ observed Mrs Todgers

‘If he intends it!’ cried the youngest gentleman. ‘Don’t he interrupt and contradict me on every occasion? Does he ever fail to interpose himself between me and anything or anybody that he sees I have set my mind upon? Does he make a point of always pretending to forget me, when he’s pouring out the beer? Does he make bragging remarks about his razors, and insulting allusions to people who have no necessity to shave more than once a week? But let him look out! He’ll find himself shaved, pretty close, before long, and so I tell him.’

The young gentleman was mistaken in this closing sentence, inasmuch as he never told it to Jinkins, but always to Mrs Todgers.

‘However,’ he said, ‘these are not proper subjects for ladies’ ears. All I’ve got to say to you, Mrs Todgers, is, a week’s notice from next Saturday. The same house can’t contain that miscreant and me any longer. If we get over the intermediate time without bloodshed, you may think yourself pretty fortunate. I don’t myself expect we shall.’

‘Dear, dear!’ cried Mrs Todgers, ‘what would I have given to have prevented this? To lose you, sir, would be like losing the house’s right-hand. So popular as you are among the gentlemen; so generally looked up to; and so much liked! I do hope you’ll think better of it; if on nobody else’s account, on mine.’

‘There’s Jinkins,’ said the youngest gentleman, moodily. ‘Your favourite. He’ll console you, and the gentlemen too, for the loss of twenty such as me. I’m not understood in this house. I never have been.’

‘Don’t run away with that opinion, sir!’ cried Mrs Todgers, with a show of honest indignation. ‘Don’t make such a charge as that against the establishment, I must beg of you. It is not so bad as that comes to, sir. Make any remark you please against the gentlemen, or against me; but don’t say you’re not understood in this house.’

‘I’m not treated as if I was,’ said the youngest gentleman.

‘There you make a great mistake, sir,’ returned Mrs Todgers, in the same strain. ‘As many of the gentlemen and I have often said, you are too sensitive. That’s where it is. You are of too susceptible a nature; it’s in your spirit.’

The young gentleman coughed.

‘And as,’ said Mrs Todgers, ‘as to Mr Jinkins, I must beg of you, if we *are* to part, to understand that I don’t abet Mr Jinkins by any means. Far from it. I could wish that Mr Jinkins would take a lower tone in this establishment, and would not be the means of raising differences between me and gentlemen that I can much less bear to part with than I could with Mr Jinkins. Mr Jinkins is not such a boarder, sir,’ added Mrs Todgers, ‘that all considerations of private feeling and respect give way before him. Quite the contrary, I assure you.’

The young gentleman was so much mollified by these and similar speeches on the part of Mrs Todgers, that he and that lady gradually changed positions; so that she became the injured party, and he was understood to be the injurer; but in a complimentary, not in an offensive sense; his cruel conduct being attributable to his exalted nature, and to that alone. So, in the end, the young gentleman withdrew his notice, and assured Mrs Todgers of his unalterable regard; and having done so, went back to business.

‘Goodness me, Miss Pecksniffs!’ cried that lady, as she came into the back room, and sat wearily down, with her basket on her knees, and her hands folded upon it, ‘what a trial of temper it is to keep a house like this! You must have heard most of what has just passed. Now did you ever hear the like?’

‘Never!’ said the two Miss Pecksniffs.

‘Of all the ridiculous young fellows that ever I had to deal with,’ resumed Mrs Todgers, ‘that is the most ridiculous and unreasonable. Mr Jinkins is hard upon him sometimes, but not half as hard as he deserves. To mention such a gentleman as Mr Jinkins in the same breath with *him*– you know it’s too much! And yet he’s as jealous of him, bless you, as if he was his equal.’

The young ladies were greatly entertained by Mrs Todgers’s account, no less than with certain anecdotes illustrative of the youngest gentleman’s character, which she went on to tell them. But Mr Pecksniff looked quite stern and angry; and when she had concluded, said in a solemn voice:

‘Pray, Mrs Todgers, if I may inquire, what does that young gentleman contribute towards the support of these premises?’

‘Why, sir, for what *he* has, he pays about eighteen shillings a week!’ said Mrs Todgers.

‘Eighteen shillings a week!’ repeated Mr Pecksniff.

‘Taking one week with another; as near that as possible,’ said Mrs Todgers.

Mr Pecksniff rose from his chair, folded his arms, looked at her, and shook his head.

‘And do you mean to say, ma’am – is it possible, Mrs Todgers – that for such a miserable consideration as eighteen shillings a week, a female of your understanding can so far demean herself as to wear a double face, even for an instant?’

‘I am forced to keep things on the square if I can, sir,’ faltered Mrs Todgers. ‘I must preserve peace among them, and keep my connection together, if possible, Mr Pecksniff. The profit is very small.’

‘The profit!’ cried that gentleman, laying great stress upon the word. ‘The profit, Mrs Todgers! You amaze me!’

He was so severe, that Mrs Todgers shed tears.

‘The profit!’ repeated Mr pecksniff. ‘The profit of dissimulation! To worship the golden calf of Baal, for eighteen shillings a week!’

‘Don’t in your own goodness be too hard upon me, Mr Pecksniff,’ cried Mrs Todgers, taking out her handkerchief.

‘Oh Calf, Calf!’ cried Mr Pecksniff mournfully. ‘Oh, Baal, Baal! oh my friend, Mrs Todgers! To barter away that precious jewel, self-esteem, and cringe to any mortal creature – for eighteen shillings a week!’

He was so subdued and overcome by the reflection, that he immediately took down his hat from its peg in the passage, and went out for a walk, to compose his feelings. Anybody passing him in the street might have known him for a good man at first sight; for his whole figure teemed with a consciousness of the moral homily he had read to Mrs Todgers.

Eighteen shillings a week! Just, most just, thy censure, upright Pecksniff! Had it been for the sake of a ribbon, star, or garter; sleeves of lawn, a great man’s smile, a seat in parliament, a tap upon the shoulder from a courtly sword; a place, a party, or a thriving lie, or eighteen thousand pounds, or even eighteen hundred; – but to worship the golden calf for eighteen shillings a week! oh pitiful, pitiful!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WHEREIN A CERTAIN GENTLEMAN BECOMES PARTICULAR IN HIS ATTENTIONS TO A CERTAIN LADY; AND MORE COMING EVENTS THAN ONE, CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE

The family were within two or three days of their departure from Mrs Todgers's, and the commercial gentlemen were to a man despondent and not to be comforted, because of the approaching separation, when Bailey junior, at the jocund time of noon, presented himself before Miss Charity Pecksniff, then sitting with her sister in the banquet chamber, hemming six new pocket-handkerchiefs for Mr Jinkins; and having expressed a hope, preliminary and pious, that he might be blest, gave her in his pleasant way to understand that a visitor attended to pay his respects to her, and was at that moment waiting in the drawing-room. Perhaps this last announcement showed in a more striking point of view than many lengthened speeches could have done, the trustfulness and faith of Bailey's nature; since he had, in fact, last seen the visitor on the door-mat, where, after signifying to him that he would do well to go upstairs, he had left him to the guidance of his own sagacity. Hence it was at least an even chance that the visitor was then wandering on the roof of the house, or vainly seeking to extricate himself from the maze of bedrooms; Todgers's being precisely that kind of establishment in which an unpiloted stranger is pretty sure to find himself in some place where he least expects and least desires to be.

'A gentleman for me!' cried Charity, pausing in her work; 'my gracious, Bailey!'

'Ah!' said Bailey. 'It *is* my gracious, an't it? Wouldn't I be gracious neither, not if I wos him!'

The remark was rendered somewhat obscure in itself, by reason (as the reader may have observed) of a redundancy of negatives; but accompanied by action expressive of a faithful couple walking arm-in-arm towards a parochial church, mutually exchanging looks of love, it clearly signified this youth's conviction that the caller's purpose was of an amorous tendency. Miss Charity affected to reprove so great a liberty; but she could not help smiling. He was a strange boy, to be sure. There was always some ground of probability and likelihood mingled with his absurd behaviour. That was the best of it!

'But I don't know any gentlemen, Bailey,' said Miss Pecksniff. 'I think you must have made a mistake.'

Mr Bailey smiled at the extreme wildness of such a supposition, and regarded the young ladies with unimpaired affability.

'My dear Merry,' said Charity, 'who *can* it be? Isn't it odd? I have a great mind not to go to him really. So very strange, you know!'

The younger sister plainly considered that this appeal had its origin in the pride of being called upon and asked for; and that it was intended as an assertion of superiority, and a retaliation upon her for having captured the commercial gentlemen. Therefore, she replied, with great affection and politeness, that it was, no doubt, very strange indeed; and that she was totally at a loss to conceive what the ridiculous person unknown could mean by it.

'Quite impossible to divine!' said Charity, with some sharpness, 'though still, at the same time, you needn't be angry, my dear.'

'Thank you,' retorted Merry, singing at her needle. 'I am quite aware of that, my love.'

'I am afraid your head is turned, you silly thing,' said Cherry.

'Do you know, my dear,' said Merry, with engaging candour, 'that I have been afraid of that, myself, all along! So much incense and nonsense, and all the rest of it, is enough to turn a stronger head than mine. What a relief it must be to you, my dear, to be so very comfortable in that respect, and not to be worried by those odious men! How do you do it, Cherry?'

This artless inquiry might have led to turbulent results, but for the strong emotions of delight evinced by Bailey junior, whose relish in the turn the conversation had lately taken was so acute, that it impelled and forced him to the instantaneous performance of a dancing step, extremely difficult in its nature, and only to be achieved in a moment of ecstasy, which is commonly called The Frog's Hornpipe. A manifestation so lively, brought to their immediate recollection the great virtuous precept, 'Keep up appearances whatever you do,' in which they had been educated. They forbore at once, and jointly signified to Mr Bailey that if he should presume to practice that figure any more in their presence, they would instantly acquaint Mrs Todgers with the fact, and would demand his condign punishment, at the hands of that lady. The young gentleman having expressed the bitterness of his contrition by affecting to wipe away scalding tears with his apron, and afterwards feigning to wring a vast amount of water from that garment, held the door open while Miss Charity passed out; and so that damsel went in state upstairs to receive her mysterious adorer.

By some strange occurrence of favourable circumstances he had found out the drawing-room, and was sitting there alone.

'Ah, cousin!' he said. 'Here I am, you see. You thought I was lost, I'll be bound. Well! how do you find yourself by this time?'

Miss Charity replied that she was quite well, and gave Mr Jonas Chuzzlewit her hand.

'That's right,' said Mr Jonas, 'and you've got over the fatigues of the journey have you? I say. How's the other one?'

'My sister is very well, I believe,' returned the young lady. 'I have not heard her complain of any indisposition, sir. Perhaps you would like to see her, and ask her yourself?'

'No, no cousin!' said Mr Jonas, sitting down beside her on the window-seat. 'Don't be in a hurry. There's no occasion for that, you know. What a cruel girl you are!'

'It's impossible for *you* to know,' said Cherry, 'whether I am or not.'

'Well, perhaps it is,' said Mr Jonas. 'I say – Did you think I was lost? You haven't told me that.'

'I didn't think at all about it,' answered Cherry.

'Didn't you though?' said Jonas, pondering upon this strange reply. 'Did the other one?'

'I am sure it's impossible for me to say what my sister may, or may not have thought on such a subject,' cried Cherry. 'She never said anything to me about it, one way or other.'

'Didn't she laugh about it?' inquired Jonas.

'No. She didn't even laugh about it,' answered Charity.

'She's a terrible one to laugh, an't she?' said Jonas, lowering his voice.

'She is very lively,' said Cherry.

'Liveliness is a pleasant thing – when it don't lead to spending money. An't it?' asked Mr Jonas.

'Very much so, indeed,' said Cherry, with a demureness of manner that gave a very disinterested character to her assent.

'Such liveliness as yours I mean, you know,' observed Mr Jonas, as he nudged her with his elbow. 'I should have come to see you before, but I didn't know where you was. How quick you hurried off, that morning!'

'I was amenable to my papa's directions,' said Miss Charity.

'I wish he had given me his direction,' returned her cousin, 'and then I should have found you out before. Why, I shouldn't have found you even now, if I hadn't met him in the street this morning. What a sleek, sly chap he is! Just like a tomcat, an't he?'

'I must trouble you to have the goodness to speak more respectfully of my papa, Mr Jonas,' said Charity. 'I can't allow such a tone as that, even in jest.'

'Ecod, you may say what you like of *my* father, then, and so I give you leave,' said Jonas. 'I think it's liquid aggravation that circulates through his veins, and not regular blood. How old should you think my father was, cousin?'

'Old, no doubt,' replied Miss Charity; 'but a fine old gentleman.'

‘A fine old gentleman!’ repeated Jonas, giving the crown of his hat an angry knock. ‘Ah! It’s time he was thinking of being drawn out a little finer too. Why, he’s eighty!’

‘Is he, indeed?’ said the young lady.

‘And ecod,’ cried Jonas, ‘now he’s gone so far without giving in, I don’t see much to prevent his being ninety; no, nor even a hundred. Why, a man with any feeling ought to be ashamed of being eighty, let alone more. Where’s his religion, I should like to know, when he goes flying in the face of the Bible like that? Threescore-and-ten’s the mark, and no man with a conscience, and a proper sense of what’s expected of him, has any business to live longer.’

Is any one surprised at Mr Jonas making such a reference to such a book for such a purpose? Does any one doubt the old saw, that the Devil (being a layman) quotes Scripture for his own ends? If he will take the trouble to look about him, he may find a greater number of confirmations of the fact in the occurrences of any single day, than the steam-gun can discharge balls in a minute.

‘But there’s enough of my father,’ said Jonas; ‘it’s of no use to go putting one’s self out of the way by talking about *him*. I called to ask you to come and take a walk, cousin, and see some of the sights; and to come to our house afterwards, and have a bit of something. Pecksniff will most likely look in in the evening, he says, and bring you home. See, here’s his writing; I made him put it down this morning when he told me he shouldn’t be back before I came here; in case you wouldn’t believe me. There’s nothing like proof, is there? Ha, ha! I say – you’ll bring the other one, you know!’

Miss Charity cast her eyes upon her father’s autograph, which merely said – ‘Go, my children, with your cousin. Let there be union among us when it is possible;’ and after enough of hesitation to impart a proper value to her consent, withdrew to prepare her sister and herself for the excursion. She soon returned, accompanied by Miss Mercy, who was by no means pleased to leave the brilliant triumphs of Todgers’s for the society of Mr Jonas and his respected father.

‘Aha!’ cried Jonas. ‘There you are, are you?’

‘Yes, fright,’ said Mercy, ‘here I am; and I would much rather be anywhere else, I assure you.’

‘You don’t mean that,’ cried Mr Jonas. ‘You can’t, you know. It isn’t possible.’

‘You can have what opinion you like, fright,’ retorted Mercy. ‘I am content to keep mine; and mine is that you are a very unpleasant, odious, disagreeable person.’ Here she laughed heartily, and seemed to enjoy herself very much.

‘Oh, you’re a sharp gal!’ said Mr Jonas. ‘She’s a regular teaser, an’t she, cousin?’

Miss Charity replied in effect, that she was unable to say what the habits and propensities of a regular teaser might be; and that even if she possessed such information, it would ill become her to admit the existence of any creature with such an unceremonious name in her family; far less in the person of a beloved sister; ‘whatever,’ added Cherry with an angry glance, ‘whatever her real nature may be.’

‘Well, my dear,’ said Merry, ‘the only observation I have to make is, that if we don’t go out at once, I shall certainly take my bonnet off again, and stay at home.’

This threat had the desired effect of preventing any farther altercation, for Mr Jonas immediately proposed an adjournment, and the same being carried unanimously, they departed from the house straightway. On the doorstep, Mr Jonas gave an arm to each cousin; which act of gallantry being observed by Bailey junior, from the garret window, was by him saluted with a loud and violent fit of coughing, to which paroxysm he was still the victim when they turned the corner.

Mr Jonas inquired in the first instance if they were good walkers and being answered, ‘Yes,’ submitted their pedestrian powers to a pretty severe test; for he showed them as many sights, in the way of bridges, churches, streets, outsides of theatres, and other free spectacles, in that one forenoon, as most people see in a twelvemonth. It was observable in this gentleman, that he had an insurmountable distaste to the insides of buildings, and that he was perfectly acquainted with the merits of all shows, in respect of which there was any charge for admission, which it seemed were every one detestable, and of the very lowest grade of merit. He was so thoroughly possessed with this opinion, that when Miss

Charity happened to mention the circumstance of their having been twice or thrice to the theatre with Mr Jinkins and party, he inquired, as a matter of course, 'where the orders came from?' and being told that Mr Jinkins and party paid, was beyond description entertained, observing that 'they must be nice flats, certainly;' and often in the course of the walk, bursting out again into a perfect convulsion of laughter at the surpassing silliness of those gentlemen, and (doubtless) at his own superior wisdom.

When they had been out for some hours and were thoroughly fatigued, it being by that time twilight, Mr Jonas intimated that he would show them one of the best pieces of fun with which he was acquainted. This joke was of a practical kind, and its humour lay in taking a hackney-coach to the extreme limits of possibility for a shilling. Happily it brought them to the place where Mr Jonas dwelt, or the young ladies might have rather missed the point and cream of the jest.

The old-established firm of Anthony Chuzzlewit and Son, Manchester Warehousemen, and so forth, had its place of business in a very narrow street somewhere behind the Post Office; where every house was in the brightest summer morning very gloomy; and where light porters watered the pavement, each before his own employer's premises, in fantastic patterns, in the dog-days; and where spruce gentlemen with their hands in the pockets of symmetrical trousers, were always to be seen in warm weather, contemplating their undeniable boots in dusty warehouse doorways; which appeared to be the hardest work they did, except now and then carrying pens behind their ears. A dim, dirty, smoky, tumble-down, rotten old house it was, as anybody would desire to see; but there the firm of Anthony Chuzzlewit and Son transacted all their business and their pleasure too, such as it was; for neither the young man nor the old had any other residence, or any care or thought beyond its narrow limits.

Business, as may be readily supposed, was the main thing in this establishment; insomuch indeed that it shouldered comfort out of doors, and jostled the domestic arrangements at every turn. Thus in the miserable bedrooms there were files of moth-eaten letters hanging up against the walls; and linen rollers, and fragments of old patterns, and odds and ends of spoiled goods, strewed upon the ground; while the meagre bedsteads, washing-stands, and scraps of carpet, were huddled away into corners as objects of secondary consideration, not to be thought of but as disagreeable necessities, furnishing no profit, and intruding on the one affair of life. The single sitting-room was on the same principle, a chaos of boxes and old papers, and had more counting-house stools in it than chairs; not to mention a great monster of a desk straddling over the middle of the floor, and an iron safe sunk into the wall above the fireplace. The solitary little table for purposes of refection and social enjoyment, bore as fair a proportion to the desk and other business furniture, as the graces and harmless relaxations of life had ever done, in the persons of the old man and his son, to their pursuit of wealth. It was meanly laid out now for dinner; and in a chair before the fire sat Anthony himself, who rose to greet his son and his fair cousins as they entered.

An ancient proverb warns us that we should not expect to find old heads upon young shoulders; to which it may be added that we seldom meet with that unnatural combination, but we feel a strong desire to knock them off; merely from an inherent love we have of seeing things in their right places. It is not improbable that many men, in no wise choleric by nature, felt this impulse rising up within them, when they first made the acquaintance of Mr Jonas; but if they had known him more intimately in his own house, and had sat with him at his own board, it would assuredly have been paramount to all other considerations.

'Well, ghost!' said Mr Jonas, dutifully addressing his parent by that title. 'Is dinner nearly ready?'

'I should think it was,' rejoined the old man.

'What's the good of that?' rejoined the son. 'I should think it was. I want to know.'

'Ah! I don't know for certain,' said Anthony.

'You don't know for certain,' rejoined his son in a lower tone. 'No. You don't know anything for certain, *you* don't. Give me your candle here. I want it for the gals.'

Anthony handed him a battered old office candlestick, with which Mr Jonas preceded the young ladies to the nearest bedroom, where he left them to take off their shawls and bonnets; and returning, occupied himself in opening a bottle of wine, sharpening the carving-knife, and muttering compliments to his father, until they and the dinner appeared together. The repast consisted of a hot leg of mutton with greens and potatoes; and the dishes having been set upon the table by a slipshod old woman, they were left to enjoy it after their own manner.

'Bachelor's Hall, you know, cousin,' said Mr Jonas to Charity. 'I say – the other one will be having a laugh at this when she gets home, won't she? Here; you sit on the right side of me, and I'll have her upon the left. Other one, will you come here?'

'You're such a fright,' replied Mercy, 'that I know I shall have no appetite if I sit so near you; but I suppose I must.'

'An't she lively?' whispered Mr Jonas to the elder sister, with his favourite elbow emphasis.

'Oh I really don't know!' replied Miss Pecksniff, tartly. 'I am tired of being asked such ridiculous questions.'

'What's that precious old father of mine about now?' said Mr Jonas, seeing that his parent was travelling up and down the room instead of taking his seat at table. 'What are you looking for?'

'I've lost my glasses, Jonas,' said old Anthony.

'Sit down without your glasses, can't you?' returned his son. 'You don't eat or drink out of 'em, I think; and where's that sleepy-headed old Chuffey got to! Now, stupid. Oh! you know your name, do you?'

It would seem that he didn't, for he didn't come until the father called. As he spoke, the door of a small glass office, which was partitioned off from the rest of the room, was slowly opened, and a little blear-eyed, weazen-faced, ancient man came creeping out. He was of a remote fashion, and dusty, like the rest of the furniture; he was dressed in a decayed suit of black; with breeches garnished at the knees with rusty wisps of ribbon, the very paupers of shoestrings; on the lower portion of his spindle legs were dingy worsted stockings of the same colour. He looked as if he had been put away and forgotten half a century before, and somebody had just found him in a lumber-closet.

Such as he was, he came slowly creeping on towards the table, until at last he crept into the vacant chair, from which, as his dim faculties became conscious of the presence of strangers, and those strangers ladies, he rose again, apparently intending to make a bow. But he sat down once more without having made it, and breathing on his shrivelled hands to warm them, remained with his poor blue nose immovable above his plate, looking at nothing, with eyes that saw nothing, and a face that meant nothing. Take him in that state, and he was an embodiment of nothing. Nothing else.

'Our clerk,' said Mr Jonas, as host and master of the ceremonies: 'Old Chuffey.'

'Is he deaf?' inquired one of the young ladies.

'No, I don't know that he is. He an't deaf, is he, father?'

'I never heard him say he was,' replied the old man.

'Blind?' inquired the young ladies.

'N – no. I never understood that he was at all blind,' said Jonas, carelessly. 'You don't consider him so, do you, father?'

'Certainly not,' replied Anthony.

'What is he, then?'

'Why, I'll tell you what he is,' said Mr Jonas, apart to the young ladies, 'he's precious old, for one thing; and I an't best pleased with him for that, for I think my father must have caught it of him. He's a strange old chap, for another,' he added in a louder voice, 'and don't understand any one hardly, but *him*!' He pointed to his honoured parent with the carving-fork, in order that they might know whom he meant.

'How very strange!' cried the sisters.

'Why, you see,' said Mr Jonas, 'he's been addling his old brains with figures and book-keeping all his life; and twenty years ago or so he went and took a fever. All the time he was out of his head (which was three weeks) he never left off casting up; and he got to so many million at last that I don't believe he's ever been quite right since. We don't do much business now though, and he an't a bad clerk.'

'A very good one,' said Anthony.

'Well! He an't a dear one at all events,' observed Jonas; 'and he earns his salt, which is enough for our look-out. I was telling you that he hardly understands any one except my father; he always understands him, though, and wakes up quite wonderful. He's been used to his ways so long, you see! Why, I've seen him play whist, with my father for a partner; and a good rubber too; when he had no more notion what sort of people he was playing against, than you have.'

'Has he no appetite?' asked Merry.

'Oh, yes,' said Jonas, plying his own knife and fork very fast. 'He eats – when he's helped. But he don't care whether he waits a minute or an hour, as long as father's here; so when I'm at all sharp set, as I am to-day, I come to him after I've taken the edge off my own hunger, you know. Now, Chuffey, stupid, are you ready?'

Chuffey remained immovable.

'Always a perverse old file, he was,' said Mr Jonas, coolly helping himself to another slice. 'Ask him, father.'

'Are you ready for your dinner, Chuffey?' asked the old man

'Yes, yes,' said Chuffey, lighting up into a sentient human creature at the first sound of the voice, so that it was at once a curious and quite a moving sight to see him. 'Yes, yes. Quite ready, Mr Chuzzlewit. Quite ready, sir. All ready, all ready, all ready.' With that he stopped, smilingly, and listened for some further address; but being spoken to no more, the light forsook his face by little and little, until he was nothing again.

'He'll be very disagreeable, mind,' said Jonas, addressing his cousins as he handed the old man's portion to his father. 'He always chokes himself when it an't broth. Look at him, now! Did you ever see a horse with such a wall-eyed expression as he's got? If it hadn't been for the joke of it I wouldn't have let him come in to-day; but I thought he'd amuse you.'

The poor old subject of this humane speech was, happily for himself, as unconscious of its purport as of most other remarks that were made in his presence. But the mutton being tough, and his gums weak, he quickly verified the statement relative to his choking propensities, and underwent so much in his attempts to dine, that Mr Jonas was infinitely amused; protesting that he had seldom seen him better company in all his life, and that he was enough to make a man split his sides with laughing. Indeed, he went so far as to assure the sisters, that in this point of view he considered Chuffey superior to his own father; which, as he significantly added, was saying a great deal.

It was strange enough that Anthony Chuzzlewit, himself so old a man, should take a pleasure in these gibings of his estimable son at the expense of the poor shadow at their table. But he did, unquestionably; though not so much – to do him justice – with reference to their ancient clerk, as in exultation at the sharpness of Jonas. For the same reason that young man's coarse allusions, even to himself, filled him with a stealthy glee; causing him to rub his hands and chuckle covertly, as if he said in his sleeve, 'I taught him. I trained him. This is the heir of my bringing-up. Sly, cunning, and covetous, he'll not squander my money. I worked for this; I hoped for this; it has been the great end and aim of my life.'

What a noble end and aim it was to contemplate in the attainment truly! But there be some who manufacture idols after the fashion of themselves, and fail to worship them when they are made; charging their deformity on outraged nature. Anthony was better than these at any rate.

Chuffey boggled over his plate so long, that Mr Jonas, losing patience, took it from him at last with his own hands, and requested his father to signify to that venerable person that he had better 'peg away at his bread;' which Anthony did.

'Aye, aye!' cried the old man, brightening up as before, when this was communicated to him in the same voice, 'quite right, quite right. He's your own son, Mr Chuzzlewit! Bless him for a sharp lad! Bless him, bless him!'

Mr Jonas considered this so particularly childish (perhaps with some reason), that he only laughed the more, and told his cousins that he was afraid one of these fine days, Chuffey would be the death of him. The cloth was then removed, and the bottle of wine set upon the table, from which Mr Jonas filled the young ladies' glasses, calling on them not to spare it, as they might be certain there was plenty more where that came from. But he added with some haste after this sally that it was only his joke, and they wouldn't suppose him to be in earnest, he was sure.

'I shall drink,' said Anthony, 'to Pecksniff. Your father, my dears. A clever man, Pecksniff. A wary man! A hypocrite, though, eh? A hypocrite, girls, eh? Ha, ha, ha! Well, so he is. Now, among friends, he is. I don't think the worse of him for that, unless it is that he overdoes it. You may overdo anything, my darlings. You may overdo even hypocrisy. Ask Jonas!'

'You can't overdo taking care of yourself,' observed that hopeful gentleman with his mouth full.

'Do you hear that, my dears?' cried Anthony, quite enraptured. 'Wisdom, wisdom! A good exception, Jonas. No. It's not easy to overdo that.'

'Except,' whispered Mr Jonas to his favourite cousin, 'except when one lives too long. Ha, ha! Tell the other one that – I say!'

'Good gracious me!' said Cherry, in a petulant manner. 'You can tell her yourself, if you wish, can't you?'

'She seems to make such game of one,' replied Mr Jonas.

'Then why need you trouble yourself about her?' said Charity. 'I am sure she doesn't trouble herself much about you.'

'Don't she though?' asked Jonas.

'Good gracious me, need I tell you that she don't?' returned the young lady.

Mr Jonas made no verbal rejoinder, but he glanced at Mercy with an odd expression in his face; and said *that* wouldn't break his heart, she might depend upon it. Then he looked on Charity with even greater favour than before, and besought her, as his polite manner was, to 'come a little closer.'

'There's another thing that's not easily overdone, father,' remarked Jonas, after a short silence.

'What's that?' asked the father; grinning already in anticipation.

'A bargain,' said the son. 'Here's the rule for bargains – "Do other men, for they would do you." That's the true business precept. All others are counterfeits.'

The delighted father applauded this sentiment to the echo; and was so much tickled by it, that he was at the pains of imparting the same to his ancient clerk, who rubbed his hands, nodded his palsied head, winked his watery eyes, and cried in his whistling tones, 'Good! good! Your own son, Mr Chuzzlewit' with every feeble demonstration of delight that he was capable of making. But this old man's enthusiasm had the redeeming quality of being felt in sympathy with the only creature to whom he was linked by ties of long association, and by his present helplessness. And if there had been anybody there, who cared to think about it, some dregs of a better nature unawakened, might perhaps have been descried through that very medium, melancholy though it was, yet lingering at the bottom of the worn-out cask called Chuffey.

As matters stood, nobody thought or said anything upon the subject; so Chuffey fell back into a dark corner on one side of the fireplace, where he always spent his evenings, and was neither seen nor heard again that night; save once, when a cup of tea was given him, in which he was seen to soak his bread mechanically. There was no reason to suppose that he went to sleep at these seasons, or that he heard, or saw, or felt, or thought. He remained, as it were, frozen up – if any term expressive

of such a vigorous process can be applied to him – until he was again thawed for the moment by a word or touch from Anthony.

Miss Charity made tea by desire of Mr Jonas, and felt and looked so like the lady of the house that she was in the prettiest confusion imaginable; the more so from Mr Jonas sitting close beside her, and whispering a variety of admiring expressions in her ear. Miss Mercy, for her part, felt the entertainment of the evening to be so distinctly and exclusively theirs, that she silently deplored the commercial gentlemen – at that moment, no doubt, wearying for her return – and yawned over yesterday's newspaper. As to Anthony, he went to sleep outright, so Jonas and Cherry had a clear stage to themselves as long as they chose to keep possession of it.

When the tea-tray was taken away, as it was at last, Mr Jonas produced a dirty pack of cards, and entertained the sisters with divers small feats of dexterity: whereof the main purpose of every one was, that you were to decoy somebody into laying a wager with you that you couldn't do it; and were then immediately to win and pocket his money. Mr Jonas informed them that these accomplishments were in high vogue in the most intellectual circles, and that large amounts were constantly changing hands on such hazards. And it may be remarked that he fully believed this; for there is a simplicity of cunning no less than a simplicity of innocence; and in all matters where a lively faith in knavery and meanness was required as the ground-work of belief, Mr Jonas was one of the most credulous of men. His ignorance, which was stupendous, may be taken into account, if the reader pleases, separately.

This fine young man had all the inclination to be a profligate of the first water, and only lacked the one good trait in the common catalogue of debauched vices – open-handedness – to be a notable vagabond. But there his griping and penurious habits stepped in; and as one poison will sometimes neutralise another, when wholesome remedies would not avail, so he was restrained by a bad passion from quaffing his full measure of evil, when virtue might have sought to hold him back in vain.

By the time he had unfolded all the peddling schemes he knew upon the cards, it was growing late in the evening; and Mr Pecksniff not making his appearance, the young ladies expressed a wish to return home. But this, Mr Jonas, in his gallantry, would by no means allow, until they had partaken of some bread and cheese and porter; and even then he was excessively unwilling to allow them to depart; often beseeching Miss Charity to come a little closer, or to stop a little longer, and preferring many other complimentary petitions of that nature in his own hospitable and earnest way. When all his efforts to detain them were fruitless, he put on his hat and greatcoat preparatory to escorting them to Todgers's; remarking that he knew they would rather walk thither than ride; and that for his part he was quite of their opinion.

'Good night,' said Anthony. 'Good night; remember me to – ha, ha, ha! – to Pecksniff. Take care of your cousin, my dears; beware of Jonas; he's a dangerous fellow. Don't quarrel for him, in any case!'

'Oh, the creature!' cried Mercy. 'The idea of quarrelling for *him*! You may take him, Cherry, my love, all to yourself. I make you a present of my share.'

'What! I'm a sour grape, am I, cousin?' said Jonas.

Miss Charity was more entertained by this repartee than one would have supposed likely, considering its advanced age and simple character. But in her sisterly affection she took Mr Jonas to task for leaning so very hard upon a broken reed, and said that he must not be so cruel to poor Merry any more, or she (Charity) would positively be obliged to hate him. Mercy, who really had her share of good humour, only retorted with a laugh; and they walked home in consequence without any angry passages of words upon the way. Mr Jonas being in the middle, and having a cousin on each arm, sometimes squeezed the wrong one; so tightly too, as to cause her not a little inconvenience; but as he talked to Charity in whispers the whole time, and paid her great attention, no doubt this was an accidental circumstance. When they arrived at Todgers's, and the door was opened, Mercy broke hastily from them, and ran upstairs; but Charity and Jonas lingered on the steps talking together for more than five minutes; so, as Mrs Todgers observed next morning, to a third party, 'It was pretty

clear what was going on *there*, and she was glad of it, for it really was high time that Miss Pecksniff thought of settling.'

And now the day was coming on, when that bright vision which had burst on Todgers's so suddenly, and made a sunshine in the shady breast of Jinkins, was to be seen no more; when it was to be packed, like a brown paper parcel, or a fish-basket, or an oyster barrel or a fat gentleman, or any other dull reality of life, in a stagecoach and carried down into the country.

'Never, my dear Miss Pecksniffs,' said Mrs Todgers, when they retired to rest on the last night of their stay, 'never have I seen an establishment so perfectly broken-hearted as mine is at this present moment of time. I don't believe the gentlemen will be the gentlemen they were, or anything like it – no, not for weeks to come. You have a great deal to answer for, both of you.'

They modestly disclaimed any wilful agency in this disastrous state of things, and regretted it very much.

'Your pious pa, too,' said Mrs Todgers. 'There's a loss! My dear Miss Pecksniffs, your pa is a perfect missionary of peace and love.'

Entertaining an uncertainty as to the particular kind of love supposed to be comprised in Mr Pecksniff's mission, the young ladies received the compliment rather coldly.

'If I dared,' said Mrs Todgers, perceiving this, 'to violate a confidence which has been reposed in me, and to tell you why I must beg of you to leave the little door between your room and mine open tonight, I think you would be interested. But I mustn't do it, for I promised Mr Jinkins faithfully, that I would be as silent as the tomb.'

'Dear Mrs Todgers! What can you mean?'

'Why, then, my sweet Miss Pecksniffs,' said the lady of the house; 'my own loves, if you will allow me the privilege of taking that freedom on the eve of our separation, Mr Jinkins and the gentlemen have made up a little musical party among themselves, and *do* intend, in the dead of this night, to perform a serenade upon the stairs outside the door. I could have wished, I own,' said Mrs Todgers, with her usual foresight, 'that it had been fixed to take place an hour or two earlier; because when gentlemen sit up late they drink, and when they drink they're not so musical, perhaps, as when they don't. But this is the arrangement; and I know you will be gratified, my dear Miss Pecksniffs, by such a mark of their attention.'

The young ladies were at first so much excited by the news, that they vowed they couldn't think of going to bed until the serenade was over. But half an hour of cool waiting so altered their opinion that they not only went to bed, but fell asleep; and were, moreover, not ecstatically charmed to be awakened some time afterwards by certain dulcet strains breaking in upon the silent watches of the night.

It was very affecting – very. Nothing more dismal could have been desired by the most fastidious taste. The gentleman of a vocal turn was head mute, or chief mourner; Jinkins took the bass; and the rest took anything they could get. The youngest gentleman blew his melancholy into a flute. He didn't blow much out of it, but that was all the better. If the two Miss Pecksniffs and Mrs Todgers had perished by spontaneous combustion, and the serenade had been in honour of their ashes, it would have been impossible to surpass the unutterable despair expressed in that one chorus, 'Go where glory waits thee!' It was a requiem, a dirge, a moan, a howl, a wail, a lament, an abstract of everything that is sorrowful and hideous in sound. The flute of the youngest gentleman was wild and fitful. It came and went in gusts, like the wind. For a long time together he seemed to have left off, and when it was quite settled by Mrs Todgers and the young ladies that, overcome by his feelings, he had retired in tears, he unexpectedly turned up again at the very top of the tune, gasping for breath. He was a tremendous performer. There was no knowing where to have him; and exactly when you thought he was doing nothing at all, then was he doing the very thing that ought to astonish you most.

There were several of these concerted pieces; perhaps two or three too many, though that, as Mrs Todgers said, was a fault on the right side. But even then, even at that solemn moment, when

the thrilling sounds may be presumed to have penetrated into the very depths of his nature, if he had any depths, Jinkins couldn't leave the youngest gentleman alone. He asked him distinctly, before the second song began – as a personal favour too, mark the villain in that – not to play. Yes; he said so; not to play. The breathing of the youngest gentleman was heard through the key-hole of the door. He *didn't* play. What vent was a flute for the passions swelling up within his breast? A trombone would have been a world too mild.

The serenade approached its close. Its crowning interest was at hand. The gentleman of a literary turn had written a song on the departure of the ladies, and adapted it to an old tune. They all joined, except the youngest gentleman in company, who, for the reasons aforesaid, maintained a fearful silence. The song (which was of a classical nature) invoked the oracle of Apollo, and demanded to know what would become of Todgers's when *CHARITY* and *MERCY* were banished from its walls. The oracle delivered no opinion particularly worth remembering, according to the not infrequent practice of oracles from the earliest ages down to the present time. In the absence of enlightenment on that subject, the strain deserted it, and went on to show that the Miss Pecksniffs were nearly related to Rule Britannia, and that if Great Britain hadn't been an island, there could have been no Miss Pecksniffs. And being now on a nautical tack, it closed with this verse:

'All hail to the vessel of Pecksniff the sire!
And favouring breezes to fan;
While Tritons flock round it, and proudly admire
The architect, artist, and man!'

As they presented this beautiful picture to the imagination, the gentlemen gradually withdrew to bed to give the music the effect of distance; and so it died away, and Todgers's was left to its repose.

Mr Bailey reserved his vocal offering until the morning, when he put his head into the room as the young ladies were kneeling before their trunks, packing up, and treated them to an imitation of the voice of a young dog in trying circumstances; when that animal is supposed by persons of a lively fancy, to relieve his feelings by calling for pen and ink.

'Well, young ladies,' said the youth, 'so you're a-going home, are you, worse luck?'

'Yes, Bailey, we're going home,' returned Mercy.

'An't you a-going to leave none of 'em a lock of your hair?' inquired the youth. 'It's real, an't it?'

They laughed at this, and told him of course it was.

'Oh, is it of course, though?' said Bailey. 'I know better than that. Hers an't. Why, I see it hanging up once, on that nail by the winder. Besides, I have gone behind her at dinner-time and pulled it; and she never know'd. I say, young ladies, I'm a-going to leave. I an't a-going to stand being called names by her, no longer.'

Miss Mercy inquired what his plans for the future might be; in reply to whom Mr Bailey intimated that he thought of going either into top-boots, or into the army.

'Into the army!' cried the young ladies, with a laugh.

'Ah!' said Bailey, 'why not? There's a many drummers in the Tower. I'm acquainted with 'em. Don't their country set a valley on 'em, mind you! Not at all!'

'You'll be shot, I see,' observed Mercy.

'Well!' cried Mr Bailey, 'wot if I am? There's something gamey in it, young ladies, an't there? I'd sooner be hit with a cannon-ball than a rolling-pin, and she's always a-catching up something of that sort, and throwing it at me, when the gentlemans' appetites is good. Wot,' said Mr Bailey, stung by the recollection of his wrongs, 'wot, if they *do* consume the per-vishuns. It an't *my* fault, is it?'

'Surely no one says it is,' said Mercy.

'Don't they though?' retorted the youth. 'No. Yes. Ah! oh! No one mayn't say it is! but some one knows it is. But I an't a-going to have every rise in prices wisited on me. I an't a-going to be killed

because the markets is dear. I won't stop. And therefore,' added Mr Bailey, relenting into a smile, 'wotever you mean to give me, you'd better give me all at once, becos if ever you come back agin, I shan't be here; and as to the other boy, *he* won't deserve nothing, I know.'

The young ladies, on behalf of Mr Pecksniff and themselves, acted on this thoughtful advice; and in consideration of their private friendship, presented Mr Bailey with a gratuity so liberal that he could hardly do enough to show his gratitude; which found but an imperfect vent, during the remainder of the day, in divers secret slaps upon his pocket, and other such facetious pantomime. Nor was it confined to these ebullitions; for besides crushing a bandbox, with a bonnet in it, he seriously damaged Mr Pecksniff's luggage, by ardently hauling it down from the top of the house; and in short evinced, by every means in his power, a lively sense of the favours he had received from that gentleman and his family.

Mr Pecksniff and Mr Jinkins came home to dinner arm-in-arm; for the latter gentleman had made half-holiday on purpose; thus gaining an immense advantage over the youngest gentleman and the rest, whose time, as it perversely chanced, was all bespoke, until the evening. The bottle of wine was Mr Pecksniff's treat, and they were very sociable indeed; though full of lamentations on the necessity of parting. While they were in the midst of their enjoyment, old Anthony and his son were announced; much to the surprise of Mr Pecksniff, and greatly to the discomfiture of Jinkins.

'Come to say good-bye, you see,' said Anthony, in a low voice, to Mr Pecksniff, as they took their seats apart at the table, while the rest conversed among themselves. 'Where's the use of a division between you and me? We are the two halves of a pair of scissors, when apart, Pecksniff; but together we are something. Eh?'

'Unanimity, my good sir,' rejoined Mr Pecksniff, 'is always delightful.'

'I don't know about that,' said the old man, 'for there are some people I would rather differ from than agree with. But you know my opinion of you.'

Mr Pecksniff, still having 'hypocrite' in his mind, only replied by a motion of his head, which was something between an affirmative bow, and a negative shake.

'Complimentary,' said Anthony. 'Complimentary, upon my word. It was an involuntary tribute to your abilities, even at the time; and it was not a time to suggest compliments either. But we agreed in the coach, you know, that we quite understood each other.'

'Oh, quite!' assented Mr Pecksniff, in a manner which implied that he himself was misunderstood most cruelly, but would not complain.

Anthony glanced at his son as he sat beside Miss Charity, and then at Mr Pecksniff, and then at his son again, very many times. It happened that Mr Pecksniff's glances took a similar direction; but when he became aware of it, he first cast down his eyes, and then closed them; as if he were determined that the old man should read nothing there.

'Jonas is a shrewd lad,' said the old man.

'He appears,' rejoined Mr Pecksniff in his most candid manner, 'to be very shrewd.'

'And careful,' said the old man.

'And careful, I have no doubt,' returned Mr Pecksniff.

'Look ye!' said Anthony in his ear. 'I think he is sweet upon you daughter.'

'Tut, my good sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, with his eyes still closed; 'young people – young people – a kind of cousins, too – no more sweetness than is in that, sir.'

'Why, there is very little sweetness in that, according to our experience,' returned Anthony. 'Isn't there a trifle more here?'

'Impossible to say,' rejoined Mr Pecksniff. 'Quite impossible! You surprise me.'

'Yes, I know that,' said the old man, drily. 'It may last; I mean the sweetness, not the surprise; and it may die off. Supposing it should last, perhaps (you having feathered your nest pretty well, and I having done the same), we might have a mutual interest in the matter.'

Mr Pecksniff, smiling gently, was about to speak, but Anthony stopped him.

‘I know what you are going to say. It’s quite unnecessary. You have never thought of this for a moment; and in a point so nearly affecting the happiness of your dear child, you couldn’t, as a tender father, express an opinion; and so forth. Yes, quite right. And like you! But it seems to me, my dear Pecksniff,’ added Anthony, laying his hand upon his sleeve, ‘that if you and I kept up the joke of pretending not to see this, one of us might possibly be placed in a position of disadvantage; and as I am very unwilling to be that party myself, you will excuse my taking the liberty of putting the matter beyond a doubt thus early; and having it distinctly understood, as it is now, that we do see it, and do know it. Thank you for your attention. We are now upon an equal footing; which is agreeable to us both, I am sure.’

He rose as he spoke; and giving Mr Pecksniff a nod of intelligence, moved away from him to where the young people were sitting; leaving that good man somewhat puzzled and discomfited by such very plain dealing, and not quite free from a sense of having been foiled in the exercise of his familiar weapons.

But the night-coach had a punctual character, and it was time to join it at the office; which was so near at hand that they had already sent their luggage and arranged to walk. Thither the whole party repaired, therefore, after no more delay than sufficed for the equipment of the Miss Pecksniffs and Mrs Todgers. They found the coach already at its starting-place, and the horses in; there, too, were a large majority of the commercial gentlemen, including the youngest, who was visibly agitated, and in a state of deep mental dejection.

Nothing could equal the distress of Mrs Todgers in parting from the young ladies, except the strong emotions with which she bade adieu to Mr Pecksniff. Never surely was a pocket-handkerchief taken in and out of a flat reticule so often as Mrs Todgers’s was, as she stood upon the pavement by the coach-door supported on either side by a commercial gentleman; and by the sight of the coach-lamps caught such brief snatches and glimpses of the good man’s face, as the constant interposition of Mr Jinkins allowed. For Jinkins, to the last the youngest gentleman’s rock a-head in life, stood upon the coachstep talking to the ladies. Upon the other step was Mr Jonas, who maintained that position in right of his cousinship; whereas the youngest gentleman, who had been first upon the ground, was deep in the booking-office among the black and red placards, and the portraits of fast coaches, where he was ignominiously harassed by porters, and had to contend and strive perpetually with heavy baggage. This false position, combined with his nervous excitement, brought about the very consummation and catastrophe of his miseries; for when in the moment of parting he aimed a flower, a hothouse flower that had cost money, at the fair hand of Mercy, it reached, instead, the coachman on the box, who thanked him kindly, and stuck it in his buttonhole.

They were off now; and Todgers’s was alone again. The two young ladies, leaning back in their separate corners, resigned themselves to their own regretful thoughts. But Mr Pecksniff, dismissing all ephemeral considerations of social pleasure and enjoyment, concentrated his meditations on the one great virtuous purpose before him, of casting out that ingrate and deceiver, whose presence yet troubled his domestic hearth, and was a sacrilege upon the altars of his household gods.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WILL BE SEEN IN THE LONG RUN, IF NOT IN THE SHORT ONE, TO CONCERN MR PINCH AND OTHERS, NEARLY. MR PECKSNIFF ASSERTS THE DIGNITY OF OUTRAGED VIRTUE. YOUNG MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT FORMS A DESPERATE RESOLUTION

Mr Pinch and Martin, little dreaming of the stormy weather that impended, made themselves very comfortable in the Pecksniffian halls, and improved their friendship daily. Martin's facility, both of invention and execution, being remarkable, the grammar-school proceeded with great vigour; and Tom repeatedly declared, that if there were anything like certainty in human affairs, or impartiality in human judges, a design so new and full of merit could not fail to carry off the first prize when the time of competition arrived. Without being quite so sanguine himself, Martin had his hopeful anticipations too; and they served to make him brisk and eager at his task.

'If I should turn out a great architect, Tom,' said the new pupil one day, as he stood at a little distance from his drawing, and eyed it with much complacency, 'I'll tell you what should be one of the things I'd build.'

'Aye!' cried Tom. 'What?'

'Why, your fortune.'

'No!' said Tom Pinch, quite as much delighted as if the thing were done. 'Would you though? How kind of you to say so.'

'I'd build it up, Tom,' returned Martin, 'on such a strong foundation, that it should last your life – aye, and your children's lives too, and their children's after them. I'd be your patron, Tom. I'd take you under my protection. Let me see the man who should give the cold shoulder to anybody I chose to protect and patronise, if I were at the top of the tree, Tom!'

'Now, I don't think,' said Mr Pinch, 'upon my word, that I was ever more gratified than by this. I really don't.'

'Oh! I mean what I say,' retorted Martin, with a manner as free and easy in its condescension to, not to say in its compassion for, the other, as if he were already First Architect in ordinary to all the Crowned Heads in Europe. 'I'd do it. I'd provide for you.'

'I am afraid,' said Tom, shaking his head, 'that I should be a mighty awkward person to provide for.'

'Pooh, pooh!' rejoined Martin. 'Never mind that. If I took it in my head to say, "Pinch is a clever fellow; I approve of Pinch;" I should like to know the man who would venture to put himself in opposition to me. Besides, confound it, Tom, you could be useful to me in a hundred ways.'

'If I were not useful in one or two, it shouldn't be for want of trying,' said Tom.

'For instance,' pursued Martin, after a short reflection, 'you'd be a capital fellow, now, to see that my ideas were properly carried out; and to overlook the works in their progress before they were sufficiently advanced to be very interesting to *me*; and to take all that sort of plain sailing. Then you'd be a splendid fellow to show people over my studio, and to talk about Art to 'em, when I couldn't be bored myself, and all that kind of thing. For it would be devilish creditable, Tom (I'm quite in earnest, I give you my word), to have a man of your information about one, instead of some ordinary blockhead. Oh, I'd take care of you. You'd be useful, rely upon it!'

To say that Tom had no idea of playing first fiddle in any social orchestra, but was always quite satisfied to be set down for the hundred and fiftieth violin in the band, or thereabouts, is to express his modesty in very inadequate terms. He was much delighted, therefore, by these observations.

'I should be married to her then, Tom, of course,' said Martin.

What was that which checked Tom Pinch so suddenly, in the high flow of his gladness; bringing the blood into his honest cheeks, and a remorseful feeling to his honest heart, as if he were unworthy of his friend's regard?

'I should be married to her then,' said Martin, looking with a smile towards the light; 'and we should have, I hope, children about us. They'd be very fond of you, Tom.'

But not a word said Mr Pinch. The words he would have uttered died upon his lips, and found a life more spiritual in self-denying thoughts.

'All the children hereabouts are fond of you, Tom, and mine would be, of course,' pursued Martin. 'Perhaps I might name one of 'em after you. Tom, eh? Well, I don't know. Tom's not a bad name. Thomas Pinch Chuzzlewit. T. P. C. on his pinafores – no objection to that, I should say?'

Tom cleared his throat, and smiled.

'*She* would like you, Tom, I know,' said Martin.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.