DICKENS CHARLES

DOMBEY AND SON

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Dombey and Son:

Содержание

Charles Dickens
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CHAPTER 1. Dombey and Son

Dombey sat in the corner of the darkened room in the great arm-chair by the bedside, and Son lay tucked up warm in a little basket bedstead, carefully disposed on a low settee immediately in front of the fire and close to it, as if his constitution were analogous to that of a muffin, and it was essential to toast him brown while he was very new.

Dombey was about eight-and-forty years of age. Son about eight-and-forty minutes. Dombey was rather bald, rather red, and though a handsome well-made man, too stern and pompous in appearance, to be prepossessing. Son was very bald, and very red, and though (of course) an undeniably fine infant, somewhat crushed and spotty in his general effect, as yet. On the brow of Dombey, Time and his brother Care had set some marks, as on a tree that was to come down in good time – remorseless twins they are for striding through their human forests, notching as they go – while the countenance of Son was crossed with a thousand little creases, which the same deceitful Time would take delight in smoothing out and wearing away with the flat part of his scythe, as a preparation of the surface for his deeper operations.

Dombey, exulting in the long-looked-for event, jingled and jingled the heavy gold watch-chain that depended from below his trim blue coat, whereof the buttons sparkled phosphorescently in the feeble rays of the distant fire. Son, with his little fists curled up and clenched, seemed, in his feeble way, to be squaring at existence for having come upon him so unexpectedly.

'The House will once again, Mrs Dombey,' said Mr Dombey, 'be not only in name but in fact Dombey and Son;' and he added, in a tone of luxurious satisfaction, with his eyes half-closed as if he were reading the name in a device of flowers, and inhaling their fragrance at the same time; 'Dom-bey and Son!'

The words had such a softening influence, that he appended a term of endearment to Mrs Dombey's name (though not without some hesitation, as being a man but little used to that form of address): and said, 'Mrs Dombey, my – my dear.'

A transient flush of faint surprise overspread the sick lady's face as she raised her eyes towards him.

'He will be christened Paul, my – Mrs Dombey – of course.'

She feebly echoed, 'Of course,' or rather expressed it by the motion of her lips, and closed her eyes again.

'His father's name, Mrs Dombey, and his grandfather's! I wish his grandfather were alive this day! There is some inconvenience in the necessity of writing Junior,' said Mr Dombey, making a fictitious autograph on his knee; 'but it is merely of a private and personal complexion. It doesn't enter into the correspondence of the House. Its signature remains the same.' And again he said

‘Dombey and Son,’ in exactly the same tone as before.

Those three words conveyed the one idea of Mr Dombey’s life. The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre. Common abbreviations took new meanings in his eyes, and had sole reference to them. A. D. had no concern with Anno Domini, but stood for anno Dombei – and Son.

He had risen, as his father had before him, in the course of life and death, from Son to Dombey, and for nearly twenty years had been the sole representative of the Firm. Of those years he had been married, ten – married, as some said, to a lady with no heart to give him; whose happiness was in the past, and who was content to bind her broken spirit to the dutiful and meek endurance of the present. Such idle talk was little likely to reach the ears of Mr Dombey, whom it nearly concerned; and probably no one in the world would have received it with such utter incredulity as he, if it had reached him. Dombey and Son had often dealt in hides, but never in hearts. They left that fancy ware to boys and girls, and boarding-schools and books. Mr Dombey would have reasoned: That a matrimonial alliance with himself must, in the nature of things, be gratifying and honourable to any woman of common sense. That the hope of

giving birth to a new partner in such a House, could not fail to awaken a glorious and stirring ambition in the breast of the least ambitious of her sex. That Mrs Dombey had entered on that social contract of matrimony: almost necessarily part of a genteel and wealthy station, even without reference to the perpetuation of family Firms: with her eyes fully open to these advantages. That Mrs Dombey had had daily practical knowledge of his position in society. That Mrs Dombey had always sat at the head of his table, and done the honours of his house in a remarkably lady-like and becoming manner. That Mrs Dombey must have been happy. That she couldn't help it.

Or, at all events, with one drawback. Yes. That he would have allowed. With only one; but that one certainly involving much. With the drawback of hope deferred. That hope deferred, which, (as the Scripture very correctly tells us, Mr Dombey would have added in a patronising way; for his highest distinct idea even of Scripture, if examined, would have been found to be; that as forming part of a general whole, of which Dombey and Son formed another part, it was therefore to be commended and upheld) maketh the heart sick. They had been married ten years, and until this present day on which Mr Dombey sat jingling and jingling his heavy gold watch-chain in the great arm-chair by the side of the bed, had had no issue.

– To speak of; none worth mentioning. There had been a girl some six years before, and the child, who had stolen into the chamber unobserved, was now crouching timidly, in a corner

whence she could see her mother's face. But what was a girl to Dombey and Son! In the capital of the House's name and dignity, such a child was merely a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested – a bad Boy – nothing more.

Mr Dombey's cup of satisfaction was so full at this moment, however, that he felt he could afford a drop or two of its contents, even to sprinkle on the dust in the by-path of his little daughter.

So he said, 'Florence, you may go and look at your pretty brother, if you like, I daresay. Don't touch him!'

The child glanced keenly at the blue coat and stiff white cravat, which, with a pair of creaking boots and a very loud ticking watch, embodied her idea of a father; but her eyes returned to her mother's face immediately, and she neither moved nor answered.

'Her insensibility is as proof against a brother as against every thing else,' said Mr Dombey to himself He seemed so confirmed in a previous opinion by the discovery, as to be quite glad of it.'

Next moment, the lady had opened her eyes and seen the child; and the child had run towards her; and, standing on tiptoe, the better to hide her face in her embrace, had clung about her with a desperate affection very much at variance with her years.

'Oh Lord bless me!' said Mr Dombey, rising testily. 'A very ill-advised and feverish proceeding this, I am sure. Please to ring there for Miss Florence's nurse. Really the person should be more care-'

'Wait! I – had better ask Doctor Peps if he'll have the goodness

to step upstairs again perhaps. I'll go down. I'll go down. I needn't beg you,' he added, pausing for a moment at the settee before the fire, 'to take particular care of this young gentleman, Mrs – '

'Blockitt, Sir?' suggested the nurse, a simpering piece of faded gentility, who did not presume to state her name as a fact, but merely offered it as a mild suggestion.

'Of this young gentleman, Mrs Blockitt.'

'No, Sir, indeed. I remember when Miss Florence was born – '

'Ay, ay, ay,' said Mr Dombey, bending over the basket bedstead, and slightly bending his brows at the same time. 'Miss Florence was all very well, but this is another matter. This young gentleman has to accomplish a destiny. A destiny, little fellow!' As he thus apostrophised the infant he raised one of his hands to his lips, and kissed it; then, seeming to fear that the action involved some compromise of his dignity, went, awkwardly enough, away.

Doctor Parker Peps, one of the Court Physicians, and a man of immense reputation for assisting at the increase of great families, was walking up and down the drawing-room with his hands behind him, to the unspeakable admiration of the family Surgeon, who had regularly puffed the case for the last six weeks, among all his patients, friends, and acquaintances, as one to which he was in hourly expectation day and night of being summoned, in conjunction with Doctor Parker Pep.

'Well, Sir,' said Doctor Parker Peps in a round, deep, sonorous voice, muffled for the occasion, like the knocker; 'do you find

that your dear lady is at all roused by your visit?'

'Stimulated as it were?' said the family practitioner faintly: bowing at the same time to the Doctor, as much as to say, 'Excuse my putting in a word, but this is a valuable connexion.'

Mr Dombey was quite discomfited by the question. He had thought so little of the patient, that he was not in a condition to answer it. He said that it would be a satisfaction to him, if Doctor Parker Peps would walk upstairs again.

'Good! We must not disguise from you, Sir,' said Doctor Parker Peps, 'that there is a want of power in Her Grace the Duchess – I beg your pardon; I confound names; I should say, in your amiable lady. That there is a certain degree of languor, and a general absence of elasticity, which we would rather – not – '

'See,' interposed the family practitioner with another inclination of the head.

'Quite so,' said Doctor Parker Peps, 'which we would rather not see. It would appear that the system of Lady Cankaby – excuse me: I should say of Mrs Dombey: I confuse the names of cases – '

'So very numerous,' murmured the family practitioner – 'can't be expected I'm sure – quite wonderful if otherwise – Doctor Parker Peps's West-End practice – '

'Thank you,' said the Doctor, 'quite so. It would appear, I was observing, that the system of our patient has sustained a shock, from which it can only hope to rally by a great and strong – '

'And vigorous,' murmured the family practitioner.

‘Quite so,’ assented the Doctor – ‘and vigorous effort. Mr Pilkins here, who from his position of medical adviser in this family – no one better qualified to fill that position, I am sure.’

‘Oh!’ murmured the family practitioner. “‘Praise from Sir Hubert Stanley!’”

‘You are good enough,’ returned Doctor Parker Peps, ‘to say so. Mr Pilkins who, from his position, is best acquainted with the patient’s constitution in its normal state (an acquaintance very valuable to us in forming our opinions in these occasions), is of opinion, with me, that Nature must be called upon to make a vigorous effort in this instance; and that if our interesting friend the Countess of Dombey – I beg your pardon; Mrs Dombey – should not be – ’

‘Able,’ said the family practitioner.

‘To make,’ said Doctor Parker Peps.

‘That effort,’ said the family practitioner.

‘Successfully,’ said they both together.

‘Then,’ added Doctor Parker Peps, alone and very gravely, ‘a crisis might arise, which we should both sincerely deplore.’

With that, they stood for a few seconds looking at the ground. Then, on the motion – made in dumb show – of Doctor Parker Peps, they went upstairs; the family practitioner opening the room door for that distinguished professional, and following him out, with most obsequious politeness.

To record of Mr Dombey that he was not in his way affected by this intelligence, would be to do him an injustice. He was

not a man of whom it could properly be said that he was ever startled, or shocked; but he certainly had a sense within him, that if his wife should sicken and decay, he would be very sorry, and that he would find a something gone from among his plate and furniture, and other household possessions, which was well worth the having, and could not be lost without sincere regret. Though it would be a cool, business-like, gentlemanly, self-possessed regret, no doubt.

His meditations on the subject were soon interrupted, first by the rustling of garments on the staircase, and then by the sudden whisking into the room of a lady rather past the middle age than otherwise but dressed in a very juvenile manner, particularly as to the tightness of her bodice, who, running up to him with a kind of screw in her face and carriage, expressive of suppressed emotion, flung her arms around his neck, and said, in a choking voice,

'My dear Paul! He's quite a Dombey!'

'Well, well!' returned her brother – for Mr Dombey was her brother – 'I think he is like the family. Don't agitate yourself, Louisa.'

'It's very foolish of me,' said Louisa, sitting down, and taking out her pocket-handkerchief, 'but he's – he's such a perfect Dombey!'

Mr Dombey coughed.

'It's so extraordinary,' said Louisa; smiling through her tears, which indeed were not overpowering, 'as to be perfectly

ridiculous. So completely our family. I never saw anything like it in my life!'

'But what is this about Fanny, herself?' said Mr Dombey. 'How is Fanny?'

'My dear Paul,' returned Louisa, 'it's nothing whatever. Take my word, it's nothing whatever. There is exhaustion, certainly, but nothing like what I underwent myself, either with George or Frederick. An effort is necessary. That's all. If dear Fanny were a Dombey! – But I daresay she'll make it; I have no doubt she'll make it. Knowing it to be required of her, as a duty, of course she'll make it. My dear Paul, it's very weak and silly of me, I know, to be so trembly and shaky from head to foot; but I am so very queer that I must ask you for a glass of wine and a morsel of that cake.'

Mr Dombey promptly supplied her with these refreshments from a tray on the table.

'I shall not drink my love to you, Paul,' said Louisa: 'I shall drink to the little Dombey. Good gracious me! – it's the most astonishing thing I ever knew in all my days, he's such a perfect Dombey.'

Quenching this expression of opinion in a short hysterical laugh which terminated in tears, Louisa cast up her eyes, and emptied her glass.

'I know it's very weak and silly of me,' she repeated, 'to be so trembly and shaky from head to foot, and to allow my feelings so completely to get the better of me, but I cannot help it. I thought

I should have fallen out of the staircase window as I came down from seeing dear Fanny, and that tiddy ickle sing.' These last words originated in a sudden vivid reminiscence of the baby.

They were succeeded by a gentle tap at the door.

'Mrs Chick,' said a very bland female voice outside, 'how are you now, my dear friend?'

'My dear Paul,' said Louisa in a low voice, as she rose from her seat, 'it's Miss Tox. The kindest creature! I never could have got here without her! Miss Tox, my brother Mr Dombey. Paul, my dear, my very particular friend Miss Tox.'

The lady thus specially presented, was a long lean figure, wearing such a faded air that she seemed not to have been made in what linen-drapers call 'fast colours' originally, and to have, by little and little, washed out. But for this she might have been described as the very pink of general propitiation and politeness. From a long habit of listening admiringly to everything that was said in her presence, and looking at the speakers as if she were mentally engaged in taking off impressions of their images upon her soul, never to part with the same but with life, her head had quite settled on one side. Her hands had contracted a spasmodic habit of raising themselves of their own accord as in involuntary admiration. Her eyes were liable to a similar affection. She had the softest voice that ever was heard; and her nose, stupendously aquiline, had a little knob in the very centre or key-stone of the bridge, whence it tended downwards towards her face, as in an invincible determination never to turn up at anything.

Miss Tox's dress, though perfectly genteel and good, had a certain character of angularity and scantiness. She was accustomed to wear odd weedy little flowers in her bonnets and caps. Strange grasses were sometimes perceived in her hair; and it was observed by the curious, of all her collars, frills, tuckers, wristbands, and other gossamer articles – indeed of everything she wore which had two ends to it intended to unite – that the two ends were never on good terms, and wouldn't quite meet without a struggle. She had furry articles for winter wear, as tippets, boas, and muffs, which stood up on end in rampant manner, and were not at all sleek. She was much given to the carrying about of small bags with snaps to them, that went off like little pistols when they were shut up; and when full-dressed, she wore round her neck the barrenest of lockets, representing a fishy old eye, with no approach to speculation in it. These and other appearances of a similar nature, had served to propagate the opinion, that Miss Tox was a lady of what is called a limited independence, which she turned to the best account. Possibly her mincing gait encouraged the belief, and suggested that her clipping a step of ordinary compass into two or three, originated in her habit of making the most of everything.

'I am sure,' said Miss Tox, with a prodigious curtsey, 'that to have the honour of being presented to Mr Dombey is a distinction which I have long sought, but very little expected at the present moment. My dear Mrs Chick – may I say Louisa!'

Mrs Chick took Miss Tox's hand in hers, rested the foot of

her wine-glass upon it, repressed a tear, and said in a low voice, 'God bless you!'

'My dear Louisa then,' said Miss Tox, 'my sweet friend, how are you now?'

'Better,' Mrs Chick returned. 'Take some wine. You have been almost as anxious as I have been, and must want it, I am sure.'

Mr Dombey of course officiated, and also refilled his sister's glass, which she (looking another way, and unconscious of his intention) held straight and steady the while, and then regarded with great astonishment, saying, 'My dear Paul, what have you been doing!'

'Miss Tox, Paul,' pursued Mrs Chick, still retaining her hand, 'knowing how much I have been interested in the anticipation of the event of to-day, and how trembly and shaky I have been from head to foot in expectation of it, has been working at a little gift for Fanny, which I promised to present. Miss Tox is ingenuity itself.'

'My dear Louisa,' said Miss Tox. 'Don't say so.'

'It is only a pincushion for the toilette table, Paul,' resumed his sister; 'one of those trifles which are insignificant to your sex in general, as it's very natural they should be – we have no business to expect they should be otherwise – but to which we attach some interest.'

'Miss Tox is very good,' said Mr Dombey.

'And I do say, and will say, and must say,' pursued his sister, pressing the foot of the wine-glass on Miss Tox's hand, at each

of the three clauses, 'that Miss Tox has very prettily adapted the sentiment to the occasion. I call "Welcome little Dombey" Poetry, myself!'

'Is that the device?' inquired her brother.

'That is the device,' returned Louisa.

'But do me the justice to remember, my dear Louisa,' said Miss Tox in a tone of low and earnest entreaty, 'that nothing but the – I have some difficulty in expressing myself – the dubiousness of the result would have induced me to take so great a liberty: "Welcome, Master Dombey," would have been much more congenial to my feelings, as I am sure you know. But the uncertainty attendant on angelic strangers, will, I hope, excuse what must otherwise appear an unwarrantable familiarity.' Miss Tox made a graceful bend as she spoke, in favour of Mr Dombey, which that gentleman graciously acknowledged. Even the sort of recognition of Dombey and Son, conveyed in the foregoing conversation, was so palatable to him, that his sister, Mrs Chick – though he affected to consider her a weak good-natured person – had perhaps more influence over him than anybody else.

'My dear Paul,' that lady broke out afresh, after silently contemplating his features for a few moments, 'I don't know whether to laugh or cry when I look at you, I declare, you do so remind me of that dear baby upstairs.'

'Well!' said Mrs Chick, with a sweet smile, 'after this, I forgive Fanny everything!'

It was a declaration in a Christian spirit, and Mrs Chick felt

that it did her good. Not that she had anything particular to forgive in her sister-in-law, nor indeed anything at all, except her having married her brother – in itself a species of audacity – and her having, in the course of events, given birth to a girl instead of a boy: which, as Mrs Chick had frequently observed, was not quite what she had expected of her, and was not a pleasant return for all the attention and distinction she had met with.

Mr Dombey being hastily summoned out of the room at this moment, the two ladies were left alone together. Miss Tox immediately became spasmodic.

'I knew you would admire my brother. I told you so beforehand, my dear,' said Louisa. Miss Tox's hands and eyes expressed how much. 'And as to his property, my dear!'

'Ah!' said Miss Tox, with deep feeling.

'Im-mense!'

'But his deportment, my dear Louisa!' said Miss Tox. 'His presence! His dignity! No portrait that I have ever seen of anyone has been half so replete with those qualities. Something so stately, you know: so uncompromising: so very wide across the chest: so upright! A pecuniary Duke of York, my love, and nothing short of it!' said Miss Tox. 'That's what I should designate him.'

'Why, my dear Paul!' exclaimed his sister, as he returned, 'you look quite pale! There's nothing the matter?'

'I am sorry to say, Louisa, that they tell me that Fanny – '

'Now, my dear Paul,' returned his sister rising, 'don't believe it.

Do not allow yourself to receive a turn unnecessarily. Remember of what importance you are to society, and do not allow yourself to be worried by what is so very inconsiderately told you by people who ought to know better. Really I'm surprised at them.'

'I hope I know, Louisa,' said Mr Dombey, stiffly, 'how to bear myself before the world.'

'Nobody better, my dear Paul. Nobody half so well. They would be ignorant and base indeed who doubted it.'

'Ignorant and base indeed!' echoed Miss Tox softly.

'But,' pursued Louisa, 'if you have any reliance on my experience, Paul, you may rest assured that there is nothing wanting but an effort on Fanny's part. And that effort,' she continued, taking off her bonnet, and adjusting her cap and gloves, in a business-like manner, 'she must be encouraged, and really, if necessary, urged to make. Now, my dear Paul, come upstairs with me.'

Mr Dombey, who, besides being generally influenced by his sister for the reason already mentioned, had really faith in her as an experienced and bustling matron, acquiesced; and followed her, at once, to the sick chamber.

The lady lay upon her bed as he had left her, clasping her little daughter to her breast. The child clung close about her, with the same intensity as before, and never raised her head, or moved her soft cheek from her mother's face, or looked on those who stood around, or spoke, or moved, or shed a tear.

'Restless without the little girl,' the Doctor whispered Mr

Dombey. 'We found it best to have her in again.'

'Can nothing be done?' asked Mr Dombey.

The Doctor shook his head. 'We can do no more.'

The windows stood open, and the twilight was gathering without.

The scent of the restoratives that had been tried was pungent in the room, but had no fragrance in the dull and languid air the lady breathed.

There was such a solemn stillness round the bed; and the two medical attendants seemed to look on the impassive form with so much compassion and so little hope, that Mrs Chick was for the moment diverted from her purpose. But presently summoning courage, and what she called presence of mind, she sat down by the bedside, and said in the low precise tone of one who endeavours to awaken a sleeper:

'Fanny! Fanny!'

There was no sound in answer but the loud ticking of Mr Dombey's watch and Doctor Parker Peps's watch, which seemed in the silence to be running a race.

'Fanny, my dear,' said Mrs Chick, with assumed lightness, 'here's Mr Dombey come to see you. Won't you speak to him? They want to lay your little boy – the baby, Fanny, you know; you have hardly seen him yet, I think – in bed; but they can't till you rouse yourself a little. Don't you think it's time you roused yourself a little? Eh?'

She bent her ear to the bed, and listened: at the same time

looking round at the bystanders, and holding up her finger.

'Eh?' she repeated, 'what was it you said, Fanny? I didn't hear you.'

No word or sound in answer. Mr Dombey's watch and Dr Parker Peps's watch seemed to be racing faster.

'Now, really, Fanny my dear,' said the sister-in-law, altering her position, and speaking less confidently, and more earnestly, in spite of herself, 'I shall have to be quite cross with you, if you don't rouse yourself. It's necessary for you to make an effort, and perhaps a very great and painful effort which you are not disposed to make; but this is a world of effort you know, Fanny, and we must never yield, when so much depends upon us. Come! Try! I must really scold you if you don't!'

The race in the ensuing pause was fierce and furious. The watches seemed to jostle, and to trip each other up.

'Fanny!' said Louisa, glancing round, with a gathering alarm. 'Only look at me. Only open your eyes to show me that you hear and understand me; will you? Good Heaven, gentlemen, what is to be done!'

The two medical attendants exchanged a look across the bed; and the Physician, stooping down, whispered in the child's ear. Not having understood the purport of his whisper, the little creature turned her perfectly colourless face and deep dark eyes towards him; but without loosening her hold in the least.

The whisper was repeated.

'Mama!' said the child.

The little voice, familiar and dearly loved, awakened some show of consciousness, even at that ebb. For a moment, the closed eye lids trembled, and the nostril quivered, and the faintest shadow of a smile was seen.

'Mama!' cried the child sobbing aloud. 'Oh dear Mama! oh dear Mama!'

The Doctor gently brushed the scattered ringlets of the child, aside from the face and mouth of the mother. Alas how calm they lay there; how little breath there was to stir them!

Thus, clinging fast to that slight spar within her arms, the mother drifted out upon the dark and unknown sea that rolls round all the world.

CHAPTER 2. In which Timely Provision is made for an Emergency that will sometimes arise in the best-regulated Families

I shall never cease to congratulate myself,' said Mrs Chick,' on having said, when I little thought what was in store for us, – really as if I was inspired by something, – that I forgave poor dear Fanny everything. Whatever happens, that must always be a comfort to me!'

Mrs Chick made this impressive observation in the drawing-room, after having descended thither from the inspection of the mantua-makers upstairs, who were busy on the family mourning. She delivered it for the behoof of Mr Chick, who was a stout bald gentleman, with a very large face, and his hands continually in his pockets, and who had a tendency in his nature to whistle and hum tunes, which, sensible of the indecorum of such sounds in a house of grief, he was at some pains to repress at present.

'Don't you over-exert yourself, Loo,' said Mr Chick, 'or you'll be laid up with spasms, I see. Right tol loor rul! Bless my soul, I forgot! We're here one day and gone the next!'

Mrs Chick contented herself with a glance of reproof, and then proceeded with the thread of her discourse.

‘I am sure,’ she said, ‘I hope this heart-rending occurrence will be a warning to all of us, to accustom ourselves to rouse ourselves, and to make efforts in time where they’re required of us. There’s a moral in everything, if we would only avail ourselves of it. It will be our own faults if we lose sight of this one.’

Mr Chick invaded the grave silence which ensued on this remark with the singularly inappropriate air of ‘A cobbler there was;’ and checking himself, in some confusion, observed, that it was undoubtedly our own faults if we didn’t improve such melancholy occasions as the present.

‘Which might be better improved, I should think, Mr C.,’ retorted his helpmate, after a short pause, ‘than by the introduction, either of the college hornpipe, or the equally unmeaning and unfeeling remark of rump-te-iddity, bow-wow-wow!’ – which Mr Chick had indeed indulged in, under his breath, and which Mrs Chick repeated in a tone of withering scorn.

‘Merely habit, my dear,’ pleaded Mr Chick.

‘Nonsense! Habit!’ returned his wife. ‘If you’re a rational being, don’t make such ridiculous excuses. Habit! If I was to get a habit (as you call it) of walking on the ceiling, like the flies, I should hear enough of it, I daresay.’

It appeared so probable that such a habit might be attended with some degree of notoriety, that Mr Chick didn’t venture to dispute the position.

‘Bow-wow-wow!’ repeated Mrs Chick with an emphasis of

blighting contempt on the last syllable. 'More like a professional singer with the hydrophobia, than a man in your station of life!'

'How's the Baby, Loo?' asked Mr Chick: to change the subject.

'What Baby do you mean?' answered Mrs Chick.

'The poor bereaved little baby,' said Mr Chick. 'I don't know of any other, my dear.'

'You don't know of any other,' retorted Mrs Chick. 'More shame for you, I was going to say.'

Mr Chick looked astonished.

'I am sure the morning I have had, with that dining-room downstairs, one mass of babies, no one in their senses would believe.'

'One mass of babies!' repeated Mr Chick, staring with an alarmed expression about him.

'It would have occurred to most men,' said Mrs Chick, 'that poor dear Fanny being no more, – those words of mine will always be a balm and comfort to me,' here she dried her eyes; 'it becomes necessary to provide a Nurse.'

'Oh! Ah!' said Mr Chick. 'Toor-ru! – such is life, I mean. I hope you are suited, my dear.'

'Indeed I am not,' said Mrs Chick; 'nor likely to be, so far as I can see, and in the meantime the poor child seems likely to be starved to death. Paul is so very particular – naturally so, of course, having set his whole heart on this one boy – and there are so many objections to everybody that offers, that I don't see, myself, the least chance of an arrangement. Meanwhile, of

course, the child is – '

'Going to the Devil,' said Mr Chick, thoughtfully, 'to be sure.'

Admonished, however, that he had committed himself, by the indignation expressed in Mrs Chick's countenance at the idea of a Dombey going there; and thinking to atone for his misconduct by a bright suggestion, he added:

'Couldn't something temporary be done with a teapot?'

If he had meant to bring the subject prematurely to a close, he could not have done it more effectually. After looking at him for some moments in silent resignation, Mrs Chick said she trusted he hadn't said it in aggravation, because that would do very little honour to his heart. She trusted he hadn't said it seriously, because that would do very little honour to his head. As in any case, he couldn't, however sanguine his disposition, hope to offer a remark that would be a greater outrage on human nature in general, we would beg to leave the discussion at that point.

Mrs Chick then walked majestically to the window and peeped through the blind, attracted by the sound of wheels. Mr Chick, finding that his destiny was, for the time, against him, said no more, and walked off. But it was not always thus with Mr Chick. He was often in the ascendant himself, and at those times punished Louisa roundly. In their matrimonial bickerings they were, upon the whole, a well-matched, fairly-balanced, give-and-take couple. It would have been, generally speaking, very difficult to have betted on the winner. Often when Mr Chick seemed beaten, he would suddenly make a start, turn the tables,

clatter them about the ears of Mrs Chick, and carry all before him. Being liable himself to similar unlooked for checks from Mrs Chick, their little contests usually possessed a character of uncertainty that was very animating.

Miss Tox had arrived on the wheels just now alluded to, and came running into the room in a breathless condition.

'My dear Louisa,' said Miss Tox, 'is the vacancy still unsupplied?'

'You good soul, yes,' said Mrs Chick.

'Then, my dear Louisa,' returned Miss Tox, 'I hope and believe – but in one moment, my dear, I'll introduce the party.'

Running downstairs again as fast as she had run up, Miss Tox got the party out of the hackney-coach, and soon returned with it under convoy.

It then appeared that she had used the word, not in its legal or business acceptation, when it merely expresses an individual, but as a noun of multitude, or signifying many: for Miss Tox escorted a plump rosy-cheeked wholesome apple-faced young woman, with an infant in her arms; a younger woman not so plump, but apple-faced also, who led a plump and apple-faced child in each hand; another plump and also apple-faced boy who walked by himself; and finally, a plump and apple-faced man, who carried in his arms another plump and apple-faced boy, whom he stood down on the floor, and admonished, in a husky whisper, to 'kitch hold of his brother Johnny.'

'My dear Louisa,' said Miss Tox, 'knowing your great anxiety,

and wishing to relieve it, I posted off myself to the Queen Charlotte's Royal Married Females,' which you had forgot, and put the question, Was there anybody there that they thought would suit? No, they said there was not. When they gave me that answer, I do assure you, my dear, I was almost driven to despair on your account. But it did so happen, that one of the Royal Married Females, hearing the inquiry, reminded the matron of another who had gone to her own home, and who, she said, would in all likelihood be most satisfactory. The moment I heard this, and had it corroborated by the matron – excellent references and unimpeachable character – I got the address, my dear, and posted off again.'

'Like the dear good Tox, you are!' said Louisa.

'Not at all,' returned Miss Tox. 'Don't say so. Arriving at the house (the cleanest place, my dear! You might eat your dinner off the floor), I found the whole family sitting at table; and feeling that no account of them could be half so comfortable to you and Mr Dombey as the sight of them all together, I brought them all away. This gentleman,' said Miss Tox, pointing out the apple-faced man, 'is the father. Will you have the goodness to come a little forward, Sir?'

The apple-faced man having sheepishly complied with this request, stood chuckling and grinning in a front row.

'This is his wife, of course,' said Miss Tox, singling out the young woman with the baby. 'How do you do, Polly?'

'I'm pretty well, I thank you, Ma'am,' said Polly.

By way of bringing her out dexterously, Miss Tox had made the inquiry as in condescension to an old acquaintance whom she hadn't seen for a fortnight or so.

'I'm glad to hear it,' said Miss Tox. 'The other young woman is her unmarried sister who lives with them, and would take care of her children. Her name's Jemima. How do you do, Jemima?'

'I'm pretty well, I thank you, Ma'am,' returned Jemima.

'I'm very glad indeed to hear it,' said Miss Tox. 'I hope you'll keep so. Five children. Youngest six weeks. The fine little boy with the blister on his nose is the eldest. The blister, I believe,' said Miss Tox, looking round upon the family, 'is not constitutional, but accidental?'

The apple-faced man was understood to growl, 'Flat iron.'

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' said Miss Tox, 'did you – '

'Flat iron,' he repeated.

'Oh yes,' said Miss Tox. 'Yes! quite true. I forgot. The little creature, in his mother's absence, smelt a warm flat iron. You're quite right, Sir. You were going to have the goodness to inform me, when we arrived at the door that you were by trade a – '

'Stoker,' said the man.

'A choker!' said Miss Tox, quite aghast.

'Stoker,' said the man. 'Steam ingine.'

'Oh-h! Yes!' returned Miss Tox, looking thoughtfully at him, and seeming still to have but a very imperfect understanding of his meaning.

'And how do you like it, Sir?'

‘Which, Mum?’ said the man.

‘That,’ replied Miss Tox. ‘Your trade.’

‘Oh! Pretty well, Mum. The ashes sometimes gets in here;’ touching his chest: ‘and makes a man speak gruff, as at the present time. But it is ashes, Mum, not crustiness.’

Miss Tox seemed to be so little enlightened by this reply, as to find a difficulty in pursuing the subject. But Mrs Chick relieved her, by entering into a close private examination of Polly, her children, her marriage certificate, testimonials, and so forth. Polly coming out unscathed from this ordeal, Mrs Chick withdrew with her report to her brother’s room, and as an emphatic comment on it, and corroboration of it, carried the two rosiest little Toodles with her. Toodle being the family name of the apple-faced family.

Mr Dombey had remained in his own apartment since the death of his wife, absorbed in visions of the youth, education, and destination of his baby son. Something lay at the bottom of his cool heart, colder and heavier than its ordinary load; but it was more a sense of the child’s loss than his own, awakening within him an almost angry sorrow. That the life and progress on which he built such hopes, should be endangered in the outset by so mean a want; that Dombey and Son should be tottering for a nurse, was a sore humiliation. And yet in his pride and jealousy, he viewed with so much bitterness the thought of being dependent for the very first step towards the accomplishment of his soul’s desire, on a hired serving-woman who would be to the

child, for the time, all that even his alliance could have made his own wife, that in every new rejection of a candidate he felt a secret pleasure. The time had now come, however, when he could no longer be divided between these two sets of feelings. The less so, as there seemed to be no flaw in the title of Polly Toodle after his sister had set it forth, with many commendations on the indefatigable friendship of Miss Tox.

'These children look healthy,' said Mr Dombey. 'But my God, to think of their some day claiming a sort of relationship to Paul!'

'But what relationship is there!' Louisa began —

'Is there!' echoed Mr Dombey, who had not intended his sister to participate in the thought he had unconsciously expressed. 'Is there, did you say, Louisa!'

'Can there be, I mean – '

'Why none,' said Mr Dombey, sternly. 'The whole world knows that, I presume. Grief has not made me idiotic, Louisa. Take them away, Louisa! Let me see this woman and her husband.'

Mrs Chick bore off the tender pair of Toodles, and presently returned with that tougher couple whose presence her brother had commanded.

'My good woman,' said Mr Dombey, turning round in his easy chair, as one piece, and not as a man with limbs and joints, 'I understand you are poor, and wish to earn money by nursing the little boy, my son, who has been so prematurely deprived of what can never be replaced. I have no objection to your adding to the

comforts of your family by that means. So far as I can tell, you seem to be a deserving object. But I must impose one or two conditions on you, before you enter my house in that capacity. While you are here, I must stipulate that you are always known as – say as Richards – an ordinary name, and convenient. Have you any objection to be known as Richards? You had better consult your husband.'

'Well?' said Mr Dombey, after a pretty long pause. 'What does your husband say to your being called Richards?'

As the husband did nothing but chuckle and grin, and continually draw his right hand across his mouth, moistening the palm, Mrs Toodle, after nudging him twice or thrice in vain, dropped a curtsey and replied 'that perhaps if she was to be called out of her name, it would be considered in the wages.'

'Oh, of course,' said Mr Dombey. 'I desire to make it a question of wages, altogether. Now, Richards, if you nurse my bereaved child, I wish you to remember this always. You will receive a liberal stipend in return for the discharge of certain duties, in the performance of which, I wish you to see as little of your family as possible. When those duties cease to be required and rendered, and the stipend ceases to be paid, there is an end of all relations between us. Do you understand me?'

Mrs Toodle seemed doubtful about it; and as to Toodle himself, he had evidently no doubt whatever, that he was all abroad.

'You have children of your own,' said Mr Dombey. 'It is not

at all in this bargain that you need become attached to my child, or that my child need become attached to you. I don't expect or desire anything of the kind. Quite the reverse. When you go away from here, you will have concluded what is a mere matter of bargain and sale, hiring and letting: and will stay away. The child will cease to remember you; and you will cease, if you please, to remember the child.'

Mrs Toodle, with a little more colour in her cheeks than she had had before, said 'she hoped she knew her place.'

'I hope you do, Richards,' said Mr Dombey. 'I have no doubt you know it very well. Indeed it is so plain and obvious that it could hardly be otherwise. Louisa, my dear, arrange with Richards about money, and let her have it when and how she pleases. Mr what's-your name, a word with you, if you please!'

Thus arrested on the threshold as he was following his wife out of the room, Toodle returned and confronted Mr Dombey alone. He was a strong, loose, round-shouldered, shuffling, shaggy fellow, on whom his clothes sat negligently: with a good deal of hair and whisker, deepened in its natural tint, perhaps by smoke and coal-dust: hard knotty hands: and a square forehead, as coarse in grain as the bark of an oak. A thorough contrast in all respects, to Mr Dombey, who was one of those close-shaved close-cut moneyed gentlemen who are glossy and crisp like new bank-notes, and who seem to be artificially braced and tightened as by the stimulating action of golden showerbaths.

'You have a son, I believe?' said Mr Dombey.

‘Four on ‘em, Sir. Four hims and a her. All alive!’

‘Why, it’s as much as you can afford to keep them!’ said Mr Dombey.

‘I couldn’t hardly afford but one thing in the world less, Sir.’

‘What is that?’

‘To lose ‘em, Sir.’

‘Can you read?’ asked Mr Dombey.

‘Why, not partick’ler, Sir.’

‘Write?’

‘With chalk, Sir?’

‘With anything?’

‘I could make shift to chalk a little bit, I think, if I was put to it,’ said Toodle after some reflection.

‘And yet,’ said Mr Dombey, ‘you are two or three and thirty, I suppose?’

‘Thereabouts, I suppose, Sir,’ answered Toodle, after more reflection

‘Then why don’t you learn?’ asked Mr Dombey.

‘So I’m a going to, Sir. One of my little boys is a going to learn me, when he’s old enough, and been to school himself.’

‘Well,’ said Mr Dombey, after looking at him attentively, and with no great favour, as he stood gazing round the room (principally round the ceiling) and still drawing his hand across and across his mouth. ‘You heard what I said to your wife just now?’

‘Polly heerd it,’ said Toodle, jerking his hat over his shoulder

in the direction of the door, with an air of perfect confidence in his better half. 'It's all right.'

'But I ask you if you heard it. You did, I suppose, and understood it?' pursued Mr Dombey.

'I heerd it,' said Toodle, 'but I don't know as I understood it rightly Sir, 'account of being no scholar, and the words being – ask your pardon – rayther high. But Polly heerd it. It's all right.'

'As you appear to leave everything to her,' said Mr Dombey, frustrated in his intention of impressing his views still more distinctly on the husband, as the stronger character, 'I suppose it is of no use my saying anything to you.'

'Not a bit,' said Toodle. 'Polly heerd it. She's awake, Sir.'

'I won't detain you any longer then,' returned Mr Dombey, disappointed. 'Where have you worked all your life?'

'Mostly underground, Sir, 'till I got married. I come to the level then. I'm a going on one of these here railroads when they comes into full play.'

As he added in one of his hoarse whispers, 'We means to bring up little Biler to that line,' Mr Dombey inquired haughtily who little Biler was.

'The eldest on 'em, Sir,' said Toodle, with a smile. 'It ain't a common name. Sermuchser that when he was took to church the gen'lm'n said, it wam't a chris'en one, and he couldn't give it. But we always calls him Biler just the same. For we don't mean no harm. Not we.'

'Do you mean to say, Man,' inquired Mr Dombey; looking at

him with marked displeasure, 'that you have called a child after a boiler?'

'No, no, Sir,' returned Toodle, with a tender consideration for his mistake. 'I should hope not! No, Sir. Arter a BILER Sir. The Steamingine was a'most as good as a godfather to him, and so we called him Biler, don't you see!'

As the last straw breaks the laden camel's back, this piece of information crushed the sinking spirits of Mr Dombey. He motioned his child's foster-father to the door, who departed by no means unwillingly: and then turning the key, paced up and down the room in solitary wretchedness.

It would be harsh, and perhaps not altogether true, to say of him that he felt these rubs and gratings against his pride more keenly than he had felt his wife's death: but certainly they impressed that event upon him with new force, and communicated to it added weight and bitterness. It was a rude shock to his sense of property in his child, that these people – the mere dust of the earth, as he thought them – should be necessary to him; and it was natural that in proportion as he felt disturbed by it, he should deplore the occurrence which had made them so. For all his starched, impenetrable dignity and composure, he wiped blinding tears from his eyes as he paced up and down his room; and often said, with an emotion of which he would not, for the world, have had a witness, 'Poor little fellow!'

It may have been characteristic of Mr Dombey's pride, that he pitied himself through the child. Not poor me. Not poor

widower, confiding by constraint in the wife of an ignorant Hind who has been working 'mostly underground' all his life, and yet at whose door Death had never knocked, and at whose poor table four sons daily sit – but poor little fellow!

Those words being on his lips, it occurred to him – and it is an instance of the strong attraction with which his hopes and fears and all his thoughts were tending to one centre – that a great temptation was being placed in this woman's way. Her infant was a boy too. Now, would it be possible for her to change them?

Though he was soon satisfied that he had dismissed the idea as romantic and unlikely – though possible, there was no denying – he could not help pursuing it so far as to entertain within himself a picture of what his condition would be, if he should discover such an imposture when he was grown old. Whether a man so situated would be able to pluck away the result of so many years of usage, confidence, and belief, from the impostor, and endow a stranger with it?

But it was idle speculating thus. It couldn't happen. In a moment afterwards he determined that it could, but that such women were constantly observed, and had no opportunity given them for the accomplishment of such a design, even when they were so wicked as to entertain it. In another moment, he was remembering how few such cases seemed to have ever happened. In another moment he was wondering whether they ever happened and were not found out.

As his unusual emotion subsided, these misgivings gradually

melted away, though so much of their shadow remained behind, that he was constant in his resolution to look closely after Richards himself, without appearing to do so. Being now in an easier frame of mind, he regarded the woman's station as rather an advantageous circumstance than otherwise, by placing, in itself, a broad distance between her and the child, and rendering their separation easy and natural. Thence he passed to the contemplation of the future glories of Dombey and Son, and dismissed the memory of his wife, for the time being, with a tributary sigh or two.

Meanwhile terms were ratified and agreed upon between Mrs Chick and Richards, with the assistance of Miss Tox; and Richards being with much ceremony invested with the Dombey baby, as if it were an Order, resigned her own, with many tears and kisses, to Jemima. Glasses of wine were then produced, to sustain the drooping spirits of the family; and Miss Tox, busying herself in dispensing 'tastes' to the younger branches, bred them up to their father's business with such surprising expedition, that she made chokers of four of them in a quarter of a minute.

'You'll take a glass yourself, Sir, won't you?' said Miss Tox, as Toodle appeared.

'Thankee, Mum,' said Toodle, 'since you are suppressing.'

'And you're very glad to leave your dear good wife in such a comfortable home, ain't you, Sir?' said Miss Tox, nodding and winking at him stealthily.

'No, Mum,' said Toodle. 'Here's wishing of her back agin.'

Polly cried more than ever at this. So Mrs Chick, who had her matronly apprehensions that this indulgence in grief might be prejudicial to the little Dombey ('acid, indeed,' she whispered Miss Tox), hastened to the rescue.

'Your little child will thrive charmingly with your sister Jemima, Richards,' said Mrs Chick; 'and you have only to make an effort – this is a world of effort, you know, Richards – to be very happy indeed. You have been already measured for your mourning, haven't you, Richards?'

'Ye – es, Ma'am,' sobbed Polly.

'And it'll fit beautifully. I know,' said Mrs Chick, 'for the same young person has made me many dresses. The very best materials, too!'

'Lor, you'll be so smart,' said Miss Tox, 'that your husband won't know you; will you, Sir?'

'I should know her,' said Toodle, gruffly, 'anyhows and anywheres.'

Toodle was evidently not to be bought over.

'As to living, Richards, you know,' pursued Mrs Chick, 'why, the very best of everything will be at your disposal. You will order your little dinner every day; and anything you take a fancy to, I'm sure will be as readily provided as if you were a Lady.'

'Yes to be sure!' said Miss Tox, keeping up the ball with great sympathy. 'And as to porter! – quite unlimited, will it not, Louisa?'

'Oh, certainly!' returned Mrs Chick in the same tone. 'With a

little abstinence, you know, my dear, in point of vegetables.'

'And pickles, perhaps,' suggested Miss Tox.

'With such exceptions,' said Louisa, 'she'll consult her choice entirely, and be under no restraint at all, my love.'

'And then, of course, you know,' said Miss Tox, 'however fond she is of her own dear little child – and I'm sure, Louisa, you don't blame her for being fond of it?'

'Oh no!' cried Mrs Chick, benignantly.

'Still,' resumed Miss Tox, 'she naturally must be interested in her young charge, and must consider it a privilege to see a little cherub connected with the superior classes, gradually unfolding itself from day to day at one common fountain – is it not so, Louisa?'

'Most undoubtedly!' said Mrs Chick. 'You see, my love, she's already quite contented and comfortable, and means to say goodbye to her sister Jemima and her little pets, and her good honest husband, with a light heart and a smile; don't she, my dear?'

'Oh yes!' cried Miss Tox. 'To be sure she does!'

Notwithstanding which, however, poor Polly embraced them all round in great distress, and coming to her spouse at last, could not make up her mind to part from him, until he gently disengaged himself, at the close of the following allegorical piece of consolation:

'Polly, old 'ooman, whatever you do, my darling, hold up your head and fight low. That's the only rule as I know on, that'll

carry anyone through life. You always have held up your head and fought low, Polly. Do it now, or Bricks is no longer so. God bless you, Polly! Me and J'mima will do your duty by you; and with relating to your'n, hold up your head and fight low, Polly, and you can't go wrong!'

Fortified by this golden secret, Polly finally ran away to avoid any more particular leave-taking between herself and the children. But the stratagem hardly succeeded as well as it deserved; for the smallest boy but one divining her intent, immediately began swarming upstairs after her – if that word of doubtful etymology be admissible – on his arms and legs; while the eldest (known in the family by the name of Biler, in remembrance of the steam engine) beat a demoniacal tattoo with his boots, expressive of grief; in which he was joined by the rest of the family.

A quantity of oranges and halfpence thrust indiscriminately on each young Toodle, checked the first violence of their regret, and the family were speedily transported to their own home, by means of the hackney-coach kept in waiting for that purpose. The children, under the guardianship of Jemima, blocked up the window, and dropped out oranges and halfpence all the way along. Mr Toodle himself preferred to ride behind among the spikes, as being the mode of conveyance to which he was best accustomed.

CHAPTER 3. In which Mr Dombey, as a Man and a Father, is seen at the Head of the Home-Department

The funeral of the deceased lady having been 'performed' to the entire satisfaction of the undertaker, as well as of the neighbourhood at large, which is generally disposed to be captious on such a point, and is prone to take offence at any omissions or short-comings in the ceremonies, the various members of Mr Dombey's household subsided into their several places in the domestic system. That small world, like the great one out of doors, had the capacity of easily forgetting its dead; and when the cook had said she was a quiet-tempered lady, and the house-keeper had said it was the common lot, and the butler had said who'd have thought it, and the housemaid had said she couldn't hardly believe it, and the footman had said it seemed exactly like a dream, they had quite worn the subject out, and began to think their mourning was wearing rusty too.

On Richards, who was established upstairs in a state of honourable captivity, the dawn of her new life seemed to break cold and grey. Mr Dombey's house was a large one, on the shady side of a tall, dark, dreadfully genteel street in the region between Portland Place and Bryanstone Square. It was a corner house, with great wide areas containing cellars frowned upon by

barred windows, and leered at by crooked-eyed doors leading to dustbins. It was a house of dismal state, with a circular back to it, containing a whole suite of drawing-rooms looking upon a gravelled yard, where two gaunt trees, with blackened trunks and branches, rattled rather than rustled, their leaves were so smoked-dried. The summer sun was never on the street, but in the morning about breakfast-time, when it came with the water-carts and the old clothes men, and the people with geraniums, and the umbrella-mender, and the man who trilled the little bell of the Dutch clock as he went along. It was soon gone again to return no more that day; and the bands of music and the straggling Punch's shows going after it, left it a prey to the most dismal of organs, and white mice; with now and then a porcupine, to vary the entertainments; until the butlers whose families were dining out, began to stand at the house-doors in the twilight, and the lamp-lighter made his nightly failure in attempting to brighten up the street with gas.

It was as blank a house inside as outside. When the funeral was over, Mr Dombey ordered the furniture to be covered up – perhaps to preserve it for the son with whom his plans were all associated – and the rooms to be ungarnished, saving such as he retained for himself on the ground floor. Accordingly, mysterious shapes were made of tables and chairs, heaped together in the middle of rooms, and covered over with great winding-sheets. Bell-handles, window-blinds, and looking-glasses, being papered up in journals, daily and weekly, obtruded

fragmentary accounts of deaths and dreadful murders. Every chandelier or lustre, muffled in holland, looked like a monstrous tear depending from the ceiling's eye. Odours, as from vaults and damp places, came out of the chimneys. The dead and buried lady was awful in a picture-frame of ghastly bandages. Every gust of wind that rose, brought eddying round the corner from the neighbouring mews, some fragments of the straw that had been strewn before the house when she was ill, mildewed remains of which were still cleaving to the neighbourhood: and these, being always drawn by some invisible attraction to the threshold of the dirty house to let immediately opposite, addressed a dismal eloquence to Mr Dombey's windows.

The apartments which Mr Dombey reserved for his own inhabiting, were attainable from the hall, and consisted of a sitting-room; a library, which was in fact a dressing-room, so that the smell of hot-pressed paper, vellum, morocco, and Russia leather, contended in it with the smell of divers pairs of boots; and a kind of conservatory or little glass breakfast-room beyond, commanding a prospect of the trees before mentioned, and, generally speaking, of a few prowling cats. These three rooms opened upon one another. In the morning, when Mr Dombey was at his breakfast in one or other of the two first-mentioned of them, as well as in the afternoon when he came home to dinner, a bell was rung for Richards to repair to this glass chamber, and there walk to and fro with her young charge. From the glimpses she caught of Mr Dombey at these times, sitting in the dark

distance, looking out towards the infant from among the dark heavy furniture – the house had been inhabited for years by his father, and in many of its appointments was old-fashioned and grim – she began to entertain ideas of him in his solitary state, as if he were a lone prisoner in a cell, or a strange apparition that was not to be accosted or understood. Mr Dombey came to be, in the course of a few days, invested in his own person, to her simple thinking, with all the mystery and gloom of his house. As she walked up and down the glass room, or sat hushing the baby there – which she very often did for hours together, when the dusk was closing in, too – she would sometimes try to pierce the gloom beyond, and make out how he was looking and what he was doing. Sensible that she was plainly to be seen by him, however, she never dared to pry in that direction but very furtively and for a moment at a time. Consequently she made out nothing, and Mr Dombey in his den remained a very shade.

Little Paul Dombey's foster-mother had led this life herself, and had carried little Paul through it for some weeks; and had returned upstairs one day from a melancholy saunter through the dreary rooms of state (she never went out without Mrs Chick, who called on fine mornings, usually accompanied by Miss Tox, to take her and Baby for an airing – or in other words, to march them gravely up and down the pavement, like a walking funeral); when, as she was sitting in her own room, the door was slowly and quietly opened, and a dark-eyed little girl looked in.

'It's Miss Florence come home from her aunt's, no doubt,'

thought Richards, who had never seen the child before. ‘Hope I see you well, Miss.’

‘Is that my brother?’ asked the child, pointing to the Baby.

‘Yes, my pretty,’ answered Richards. ‘Come and kiss him.’

But the child, instead of advancing, looked her earnestly in the face, and said:

‘What have you done with my Mama?’

‘Lord bless the little creeter!’ cried Richards, ‘what a sad question! I done? Nothing, Miss.’

‘What have they done with my Mama?’ inquired the child, with exactly the same look and manner.

‘I never saw such a melting thing in all my life!’ said Richards, who naturally substituted for this child one of her own, inquiring for herself in like circumstances. ‘Come nearer here, my dear Miss! Don’t be afraid of me.’

‘I am not afraid of you,’ said the child, drawing nearer. ‘But I want to know what they have done with my Mama.’

Her heart swelled so as she stood before the woman, looking into her eyes, that she was fain to press her little hand upon her breast and hold it there. Yet there was a purpose in the child that prevented both her slender figure and her searching gaze from faltering.

‘My darling,’ said Richards, ‘you wear that pretty black frock in remembrance of your Mama.’

‘I can remember my Mama,’ returned the child, with tears springing to her eyes, ‘in any frock.’

‘But people put on black, to remember people when they’re gone.’

‘Where gone?’ asked the child.

‘Come and sit down by me,’ said Richards, ‘and I’ll tell you a story.’

With a quick perception that it was intended to relate to what she had asked, little Florence laid aside the bonnet she had held in her hand until now, and sat down on a stool at the Nurse’s feet, looking up into her face.

‘Once upon a time,’ said Richards, ‘there was a lady – a very good lady, and her little daughter dearly loved her.’

‘A very good lady and her little daughter dearly loved her,’ repeated the child.

‘Who, when God thought it right that it should be so, was taken ill and died.’

The child shuddered.

‘Died, never to be seen again by anyone on earth, and was buried in the ground where the trees grow.’

‘The cold ground?’ said the child, shuddering again.

‘No! The warm ground,’ returned Polly, seizing her advantage, ‘where the ugly little seeds turn into beautiful flowers, and into grass, and corn, and I don’t know what all besides. Where good people turn into bright angels, and fly away to Heaven!’

The child, who had dropped her head, raised it again, and sat looking at her intently.

‘So; let me see,’ said Polly, not a little flurried between this

earnest scrutiny, her desire to comfort the child, her sudden success, and her very slight confidence in her own powers. 'So, when this lady died, wherever they took her, or wherever they put her, she went to GOD! and she prayed to Him, this lady did,' said Polly, affecting herself beyond measure; being heartily in earnest, 'to teach her little daughter to be sure of that in her heart: and to know that she was happy there and loved her still: and to hope and try – Oh, all her life – to meet her there one day, never, never, never to part any more.'

'It was my Mama!' exclaimed the child, springing up, and clasping her round the neck.

'And the child's heart,' said Polly, drawing her to her breast: 'the little daughter's heart was so full of the truth of this, that even when she heard it from a strange nurse that couldn't tell it right, but was a poor mother herself and that was all, she found a comfort in it – didn't feel so lonely – sobbed and cried upon her bosom – took kindly to the baby lying in her lap – and – there, there, there!' said Polly, smoothing the child's curls and dropping tears upon them. 'There, poor dear!'

'Oh well, Miss Floy! And won't your Pa be angry neither!' cried a quick voice at the door, proceeding from a short, brown, womanly girl of fourteen, with a little snub nose, and black eyes like jet beads. 'When it was 'tickerlerly given out that you wasn't to go and worrit the wet nurse.'

'She don't worry me,' was the surprised rejoinder of Polly. 'I am very fond of children.'

‘Oh! but begging your pardon, Mrs Richards, that don’t matter, you know,’ returned the black-eyed girl, who was so desperately sharp and biting that she seemed to make one’s eyes water. ‘I may be very fond of pennywinkles, Mrs Richards, but it don’t follow that I’m to have ‘em for tea.’

‘Well, it don’t matter,’ said Polly.

‘Oh, thank’ee, Mrs Richards, don’t it!’ returned the sharp girl. ‘Remembering, however, if you’ll be so good, that Miss Floy’s under my charge, and Master Paul’s under your’n.’

‘But still we needn’t quarrel,’ said Polly.

‘Oh no, Mrs Richards,’ rejoined Spitfire. ‘Not at all, I don’t wish it, we needn’t stand upon that footing, Miss Floy being a permanency, Master Paul a temporary.’ Spitfire made use of none but comma pauses; shooting out whatever she had to say in one sentence, and in one breath, if possible.

‘Miss Florence has just come home, hasn’t she?’ asked Polly.

‘Yes, Mrs Richards, just come, and here, Miss Floy, before you’ve been in the house a quarter of an hour, you go a smearing your wet face against the expensive mourning that Mrs Richards is a wearing for your Ma!’ With this remonstrance, young Spitfire, whose real name was Susan Nipper, detached the child from her new friend by a wrench – as if she were a tooth. But she seemed to do it, more in the excessively sharp exercise of her official functions, than with any deliberate unkindness.

‘She’ll be quite happy, now she has come home again,’ said Polly, nodding to her with an encouraging smile upon her

wholesome face, 'and will be so pleased to see her dear Papa to-night.'

'Lork, Mrs Richards!' cried Miss Nipper, taking up her words with a jerk. 'Don't. See her dear Papa indeed! I should like to see her do it!'

'Won't she then?' asked Polly.

'Lork, Mrs Richards, no, her Pa's a deal too wrapped up in somebody else, and before there was a somebody else to be wrapped up in she never was a favourite, girls are thrown away in this house, Mrs Richards, I assure you.'

The child looked quickly from one nurse to the other, as if she understood and felt what was said.

'You surprise me!' cried Polly. 'Hasn't Mr Dombey seen her since – '

'No,' interrupted Susan Nipper. 'Not once since, and he hadn't hardly set his eyes upon her before that for months and months, and I don't think he'd have known her for his own child if he had met her in the streets, or would know her for his own child if he was to meet her in the streets to-morrow, Mrs Richards, as to me,' said Spitfire, with a giggle, 'I doubt if he's aweer of my existence.'

'Pretty dear!' said Richards; meaning, not Miss Nipper, but the little Florence.

'Oh! there's a Tartar within a hundred miles of where we're now in conversation, I can tell you, Mrs Richards, present company always excepted too,' said Susan Nipper; 'wish you

good morning, Mrs Richards, now Miss Floy, you come along with me, and don't go hanging back like a naughty wicked child that judgments is no example to, don't!'

In spite of being thus adjured, and in spite also of some hauling on the part of Susan Nipper, tending towards the dislocation of her right shoulder, little Florence broke away, and kissed her new friend, affectionately.

'Oh dear! after it was given out so 'tickerlerly, that Mrs Richards wasn't to be made free with!' exclaimed Susan. 'Very well, Miss Floy!'

'God bless the sweet thing!' said Richards, 'Good-bye, dear!'

'Good-bye!' returned the child. 'God bless you! I shall come to see you again soon, and you'll come to see me? Susan will let us. Won't you, Susan?'

Spitfire seemed to be in the main a good-natured little body, although a disciple of that school of trainers of the young idea which holds that childhood, like money, must be shaken and rattled and jostled about a good deal to keep it bright. For, being thus appealed to with some endearing gestures and caresses, she folded her small arms and shook her head, and conveyed a relenting expression into her very-wide-open black eyes.

'It ain't right of you to ask it, Miss Floy, for you know I can't refuse you, but Mrs Richards and me will see what can be done, if Mrs Richards likes, I may wish, you see, to take a voyage to Chaney, Mrs Richards, but I mayn't know how to leave the London Docks.'

Richards assented to the proposition.

'This house ain't so exactly ringing with merry-making,' said Miss Nipper, 'that one need be lonelier than one must be. Your Toxes and your Chickses may draw out my two front double teeth, Mrs Richards, but that's no reason why I need offer 'em the whole set.'

This proposition was also assented to by Richards, as an obvious one.

'So I'm agreeable, I'm sure,' said Susan Nipper, 'to live friendly, Mrs Richards, while Master Paul continues a permanency, if the means can be planned out without going openly against orders, but goodness gracious Miss Floy, you haven't got your things off yet, you naughty child, you haven't, come along!'

With these words, Susan Nipper, in a transport of coercion, made a charge at her young ward, and swept her out of the room.

The child, in her grief and neglect, was so gentle, so quiet, and uncomplaining; was possessed of so much affection that no one seemed to care to have, and so much sorrowful intelligence that no one seemed to mind or think about the wounding of, that Polly's heart was sore when she was left alone again. In the simple passage that had taken place between herself and the motherless little girl, her own motherly heart had been touched no less than the child's; and she felt, as the child did, that there was something of confidence and interest between them from that moment.

Notwithstanding Mr Toodle's great reliance on Polly, she was

perhaps in point of artificial accomplishments very little his superior. She had been good-humouredly working and drudging for her life all her life, and was a sober steady-going person, with matter-of-fact ideas about the butcher and baker, and the division of pence into farthings. But she was a good plain sample of a nature that is ever, in the mass, better, truer, higher, nobler, quicker to feel, and much more constant to retain, all tenderness and pity, self-denial and devotion, than the nature of men. And, perhaps, unlearned as she was, she could have brought a dawning knowledge home to Mr Dombey at that early day, which would not then have struck him in the end like lightning.

But this is from the purpose. Polly only thought, at that time, of improving on her successful propitiation of Miss Nipper, and devising some means of having little Florence aide her, lawfully, and without rebellion. An opening happened to present itself that very night.

She had been rung down into the glass room as usual, and had walked about and about it a long time, with the baby in her arms, when, to her great surprise and dismay, Mr Dombey – whom she had seen at first leaning on his elbow at the table, and afterwards walking up and down the middle room, drawing, each time, a little nearer, she thought, to the open folding doors – came out, suddenly, and stopped before her.

'Good evening, Richards.'

Just the same austere, stiff gentleman, as he had appeared to her on that first day. Such a hard-looking gentleman, that she

involuntarily dropped her eyes and her curtsey at the same time.

'How is Master Paul, Richards?'

'Quite thriving, Sir, and well.'

'He looks so,' said Mr Dombey, glancing with great interest at the tiny face she uncovered for his observation, and yet affecting to be half careless of it. 'They give you everything you want, I hope?'

'Oh yes, thank you, Sir.'

She suddenly appended such an obvious hesitation to this reply, however, that Mr Dombey, who had turned away; stopped, and turned round again, inquiringly.

'If you please, Sir, the child is very much disposed to take notice of things,' said Richards, with another curtsey, 'and – upstairs is a little dull for him, perhaps, Sir.'

'I begged them to take you out for airings, constantly,' said Mr Dombey. 'Very well! You shall go out oftener. You're quite right to mention it.'

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' faltered Polly, 'but we go out quite plenty Sir, thank you.'

'What would you have then?' asked Mr Dombey.

'Indeed Sir, I don't exactly know,' said Polly, 'unless – '

'Yes?'

'I believe nothing is so good for making children lively and cheerful, Sir, as seeing other children playing about 'em,' observed Polly, taking courage.

'I think I mentioned to you, Richards, when you came here,'

said Mr Dombey, with a frown, 'that I wished you to see as little of your family as possible.'

'Oh dear yes, Sir, I wasn't so much as thinking of that.'

'I am glad of it,' said Mr Dombey hastily. 'You can continue your walk if you please.'

With that, he disappeared into his inner room; and Polly had the satisfaction of feeling that he had thoroughly misunderstood her object, and that she had fallen into disgrace without the least advancement of her purpose.

Next night, she found him walking about the conservatory when she came down. As she stopped at the door, checked by this unusual sight, and uncertain whether to advance or retreat, he called her in. His mind was too much set on Dombey and Son, it soon appeared, to admit of his having forgotten her suggestion.

'If you really think that sort of society is good for the child,' he said sharply, as if there had been no interval since she proposed it, 'where's Miss Florence?'

'Nothing could be better than Miss Florence, Sir,' said Polly eagerly, 'but I understood from her maid that they were not to – '

Mr Dombey rang the bell, and walked till it was answered.

'Tell them always to let Miss Florence be with Richards when she chooses, and go out with her, and so forth. Tell them to let the children be together, when Richards wishes it.'

The iron was now hot, and Richards striking on it boldly – it was a good cause and she bold in it, though instinctively afraid of Mr Dombey – requested that Miss Florence might be sent down

then and there, to make friends with her little brother.

She feigned to be dandling the child as the servant retired on this errand, but she thought that she saw Mr Dombey's colour changed; that the expression of his face quite altered; that he turned, hurriedly, as if to gainsay what he had said, or she had said, or both, and was only deterred by very shame.

And she was right. The last time he had seen his slighted child, there had been that in the sad embrace between her and her dying mother, which was at once a revelation and a reproach to him. Let him be absorbed as he would in the Son on whom he built such high hopes, he could not forget that closing scene. He could not forget that he had had no part in it. That, at the bottom of its clear depths of tenderness and truth lay those two figures clasped in each other's arms, while he stood on the bank above them, looking down a mere spectator – not a sharer with them – quite shut out.

Unable to exclude these things from his remembrance, or to keep his mind free from such imperfect shapes of the meaning with which they were fraught, as were able to make themselves visible to him through the mist of his pride, his previous feeling of indifference towards little Florence changed into an uneasiness of an extraordinary kind. Young as she was, and possessing in any eyes but his (and perhaps in his too) even more than the usual amount of childish simplicity and confidence, he almost felt as if she watched and distrusted him. As if she held the clue to something secret in his breast, of the nature of which he was

hardly informed himself. As if she had an innate knowledge of one jarring and discordant string within him, and her very breath could sound it.

His feeling about the child had been negative from her birth. He had never conceived an aversion to her: it had not been worth his while or in his humour. She had never been a positively disagreeable object to him. But now he was ill at ease about her. She troubled his peace. He would have preferred to put her idea aside altogether, if he had known how. Perhaps – who shall decide on such mysteries! – he was afraid that he might come to hate her.

When little Florence timidly presented herself, Mr Dombey stopped in his pacing up and down and looked towards her. Had he looked with greater interest and with a father's eye, he might have read in her keen glance the impulses and fears that made her waver; the passionate desire to run clinging to him, crying, as she hid her face in his embrace, 'Oh father, try to love me! there's no one else!' the dread of a repulse; the fear of being too bold, and of offending him; the pitiable need in which she stood of some assurance and encouragement; and how her overcharged young heart was wandering to find some natural resting-place, for its sorrow and affection.

But he saw nothing of this. He saw her pause irresolutely at the door and look towards him; and he saw no more.

'Come in,' he said, 'come in: what is the child afraid of?'

She came in; and after glancing round her for a moment with

an uncertain air, stood pressing her small hands hard together, close within the door.

'Come here, Florence,' said her father, coldly. 'Do you know who I am?'

'Yes, Papa.'

'Have you nothing to say to me?'

The tears that stood in her eyes as she raised them quickly to his face, were frozen by the expression it wore. She looked down again, and put out her trembling hand.

Mr Dombey took it loosely in his own, and stood looking down upon her for a moment, as if he knew as little as the child, what to say or do.

'There! Be a good girl,' he said, patting her on the head, and regarding her as it were by stealth with a disturbed and doubtful look. 'Go to Richards! Go!'

His little daughter hesitated for another instant as though she would have clung about him still, or had some lingering hope that he might raise her in his arms and kiss her. She looked up in his face once more. He thought how like her expression was then, to what it had been when she looked round at the Doctor – that night – and instinctively dropped her hand and turned away.

It was not difficult to perceive that Florence was at a great disadvantage in her father's presence. It was not only a constraint upon the child's mind, but even upon the natural grace and freedom of her actions. As she sported and played about her baby brother that night, her manner was seldom so winning and so

pretty as it naturally was, and sometimes when in his pacing to and fro, he came near her (she had, perhaps, for the moment, forgotten him) it changed upon the instant and became forced and embarrassed.

Still, Polly persevered with all the better heart for seeing this; and, judging of Mr Dombey by herself, had great confidence in the mute appeal of poor little Florence's mourning dress. 'It's hard indeed,' thought Polly, 'if he takes only to one little motherless child, when he has another, and that a girl, before his eyes.'

So, Polly kept her before his eyes, as long as she could, and managed so well with little Paul, as to make it very plain that he was all the livelier for his sister's company. When it was time to withdraw upstairs again, she would have sent Florence into the inner room to say good-night to her father, but the child was timid and drew back; and when she urged her again, said, spreading her hands before her eyes, as if to shut out her own unworthiness, 'Oh no, no! He don't want me. He don't want me!'

The little altercation between them had attracted the notice of Mr Dombey, who inquired from the table where he was sitting at his wine, what the matter was.

'Miss Florence was afraid of interrupting, Sir, if she came in to say good-night,' said Richards.

'It doesn't matter,' returned Mr Dombey. 'You can let her come and go without regarding me.'

The child shrunk as she listened – and was gone, before her

humble friend looked round again.

However, Polly triumphed not a little in the success of her well-intentioned scheme, and in the address with which she had brought it to bear: whereof she made a full disclosure to Spitfire when she was once more safely entrenched upstairs. Miss Nipper received that proof of her confidence, as well as the prospect of their free association for the future, rather coldly, and was anything but enthusiastic in her demonstrations of joy.

'I thought you would have been pleased,' said Polly.

'Oh yes, Mrs Richards, I'm very well pleased, thank you,' returned Susan, who had suddenly become so very upright that she seemed to have put an additional bone in her stays.

'You don't show it,' said Polly.

'Oh! Being only a permanency I couldn't be expected to show it like a temporary,' said Susan Nipper. 'Temporaries carries it all before 'em here, I find, but though there's a excellent party-wall between this house and the next, I mayn't exactly like to go to it, Mrs Richards, notwithstanding!'

CHAPTER 4. In which some more First Appearances are made on the Stage of these Adventures

Though the offices of Dombey and Son were within the liberties of the City of London, and within hearing of Bow Bells, when their clashing voices were not drowned by the uproar in the streets, yet were there hints of adventurous and romantic story to be observed in some of the adjacent objects. Gog and Magog held their state within ten minutes' walk; the Royal Exchange was close at hand; the Bank of England, with its vaults of gold and silver 'down among the dead men' underground, was their magnificent neighbour. Just round the corner stood the rich East India House, teeming with suggestions of precious stuffs and stones, tigers, elephants, howdahs, hookahs, umbrellas, palm trees, palanquins, and gorgeous princes of a brown complexion sitting on carpets, with their slippers very much turned up at the toes. Anywhere in the immediate vicinity there might be seen pictures of ships speeding away full sail to all parts of the world; outfitting warehouses ready to pack off anybody anywhere, fully equipped in half an hour; and little timber midshipmen in obsolete naval uniforms, eternally employed outside the shop doors of nautical Instrument-makers in taking observations of the hackney carriages.

Sole master and proprietor of one of these effigies – of that which might be called, familiarly, the woodenest – of that which thrust itself out above the pavement, right leg foremost, with a suavity the least endurable, and had the shoe buckles and flapped waistcoat the least reconcileable to human reason, and bore at its right eye the most offensively disproportionate piece of machinery – sole master and proprietor of that Midshipman, and proud of him too, an elderly gentleman in a Welsh wig had paid house-rent, taxes, rates, and dues, for more years than many a full-grown midshipman of flesh and blood has numbered in his life; and midshipmen who have attained a pretty green old age, have not been wanting in the English Navy.

The stock-in-trade of this old gentleman comprised chronometers, barometers, telescopes, compasses, charts, maps, sextants, quadrants, and specimens of every kind of instrument used in the working of a ship's course, or the keeping of a ship's reckoning, or the prosecuting of a ship's discoveries. Objects in brass and glass were in his drawers and on his shelves, which none but the initiated could have found the top of, or guessed the use of, or having once examined, could have ever got back again into their mahogany nests without assistance. Everything was jammed into the tightest cases, fitted into the narrowest corners, fenced up behind the most impertinent cushions, and screwed into the acutest angles, to prevent its philosophical composure from being disturbed by the rolling of the sea. Such extraordinary precautions were taken in every instance to save room, and keep

the thing compact; and so much practical navigation was fitted, and cushioned, and screwed into every box (whether the box was a mere slab, as some were, or something between a cocked hat and a star-fish, as others were, and those quite mild and modest boxes as compared with others); that the shop itself, partaking of the general infection, seemed almost to become a snug, sea-going, ship-shape concern, wanting only good sea-room, in the event of an unexpected launch, to work its way securely to any desert island in the world.

Many minor incidents in the household life of the Ships' Instrument-maker who was proud of his little Midshipman, assisted and bore out this fancy. His acquaintance lying chiefly among ship-chandlers and so forth, he had always plenty of the veritable ships' biscuit on his table. It was familiar with dried meats and tongues, possessing an extraordinary flavour of rope yarn. Pickles were produced upon it, in great wholesale jars, with 'dealer in all kinds of Ships' Provisions' on the label; spirits were set forth in case bottles with no throats. Old prints of ships with alphabetical references to their various mysteries, hung in frames upon the walls; the Tartar Frigate under weigh, was on the plates; outlandish shells, seaweeds, and mosses, decorated the chimney-piece; the little wainscotted back parlour was lighted by a sky-light, like a cabin.

Here he lived too, in skipper-like state, all alone with his nephew Walter: a boy of fourteen who looked quite enough like a midshipman, to carry out the prevailing idea. But there it ended,

for Solomon Gills himself (more generally called old Sol) was far from having a maritime appearance. To say nothing of his Welsh wig, which was as plain and stubborn a Welsh wig as ever was worn, and in which he looked like anything but a Rover, he was a slow, quiet-spoken, thoughtful old fellow, with eyes as red as if they had been small suns looking at you through a fog; and a newly-awakened manner, such as he might have acquired by having stared for three or four days successively through every optical instrument in his shop, and suddenly came back to the world again, to find it green. The only change ever known in his outward man, was from a complete suit of coffee-colour cut very square, and ornamented with glaring buttons, to the same suit of coffee-colour minus the inexpressibles, which were then of a pale nankeen. He wore a very precise shirt-frill, and carried a pair of first-rate spectacles on his forehead, and a tremendous chronometer in his fob, rather than doubt which precious possession, he would have believed in a conspiracy against it on part of all the clocks and watches in the City, and even of the very Sun itself. Such as he was, such he had been in the shop and parlour behind the little Midshipman, for years upon years; going regularly aloft to bed every night in a howling garret remote from the lodgers, where, when gentlemen of England who lived below at ease had little or no idea of the state of the weather, it often blew great guns.

It is half-past five o'clock, and an autumn afternoon, when the reader and Solomon Gills become acquainted. Solomon Gills

is in the act of seeing what time it is by the unimpeachable chronometer. The usual daily clearance has been making in the City for an hour or more; and the human tide is still rolling westward. 'The streets have thinned,' as Mr Gills says, 'very much.' It threatens to be wet to-night. All the weatherglasses in the shop are in low spirits, and the rain already shines upon the cocked hat of the wooden Midshipman.

'Where's Walter, I wonder!' said Solomon Gills, after he had carefully put up the chronometer again. 'Here's dinner been ready, half an hour, and no Walter!'

Turning round upon his stool behind the counter, Mr Gills looked out among the instruments in the window, to see if his nephew might be crossing the road. No. He was not among the bobbing umbrellas, and he certainly was not the newspaper boy in the oilskin cap who was slowly working his way along the piece of brass outside, writing his name over Mr Gills's name with his forefinger.

'If I didn't know he was too fond of me to make a run of it, and go and enter himself aboard ship against my wishes, I should begin to be fidgetty,' said Mr Gills, tapping two or three weather-glasses with his knuckles. 'I really should. All in the Downs, eh! Lots of moisture! Well! it's wanted.'

'I believe,' said Mr Gills, blowing the dust off the glass top of a compass-case, 'that you don't point more direct and due to the back parlour than the boy's inclination does after all. And the parlour couldn't bear straighter either. Due north. Not the

twentieth part of a point either way.'

'Halloa, Uncle Sol!'

'Halloa, my boy!' cried the Instrument-maker, turning briskly round. 'What! you are here, are you?'

A cheerful looking, merry boy, fresh with running home in the rain; fair-faced, bright-eyed, and curly-haired.

'Well, Uncle, how have you got on without me all day? Is dinner ready? I'm so hungry.'

'As to getting on,' said Solomon good-naturedly, 'it would be odd if I couldn't get on without a young dog like you a great deal better than with you. As to dinner being ready, it's been ready this half hour and waiting for you. As to being hungry, I am!'

'Come along then, Uncle!' cried the boy. 'Hurrah for the admiral!'

'Confound the admiral!' returned Solomon Gills. 'You mean the Lord Mayor.'

'No I don't!' cried the boy. 'Hurrah for the admiral! Hurrah for the admiral! For-ward!'

At this word of command, the Welsh wig and its wearer were borne without resistance into the back parlour, as at the head of a boarding party of five hundred men; and Uncle Sol and his nephew were speedily engaged on a fried sole with a prospect of steak to follow.

'The Lord Mayor, Wally,' said Solomon, 'for ever! No more admirals. The Lord Mayor's your admiral.'

'Oh, is he though!' said the boy, shaking his head. 'Why, the

Sword Bearer's better than him. He draws his sword sometimes.'

'And a pretty figure he cuts with it for his pains,' returned the Uncle. 'Listen to me, Wally, listen to me. Look on the mantelshelf.'

'Why who has cocked my silver mug up there, on a nail?' exclaimed the boy.

'I have,' said his Uncle. 'No more mugs now. We must begin to drink out of glasses to-day, Walter. We are men of business. We belong to the City. We started in life this morning.'

'Well, Uncle,' said the boy, 'I'll drink out of anything you like, so long as I can drink to you. Here's to you, Uncle Sol, and Hurrah for the – '

'Lord Mayor,' interrupted the old man.

'For the Lord Mayor, Sheriffs, Common Council, and Livery,' said the boy. 'Long life to 'em!'

The uncle nodded his head with great satisfaction. 'And now,' he said, 'let's hear something about the Firm.'

'Oh! there's not much to be told about the Firm, Uncle,' said the boy, plying his knife and fork. 'It's a precious dark set of offices, and in the room where I sit, there's a high fender, and an iron safe, and some cards about ships that are going to sail, and an almanack, and some desks and stools, and an inkbottle, and some books, and some boxes, and a lot of cobwebs, and in one of 'em, just over my head, a shrivelled-up blue-bottle that looks as if it had hung there ever so long.'

'Nothing else?' said the Uncle.

‘No, nothing else, except an old birdcage (I wonder how that ever came there!) and a coal-scuttle.’

‘No bankers’ books, or cheque books, or bills, or such tokens of wealth rolling in from day to day?’ said old Sol, looking wistfully at his nephew out of the fog that always seemed to hang about him, and laying an unctuous emphasis upon the words.

‘Oh yes, plenty of that I suppose,’ returned his nephew carelessly; ‘but all that sort of thing’s in Mr Carker’s room, or Mr Morfin’s, or Mr Dombey’s.’

‘Has Mr Dombey been there to-day?’ inquired the Uncle.

‘Oh yes! In and out all day.’

‘He didn’t take any notice of you, I suppose?’.

‘Yes he did. He walked up to my seat, – I wish he wasn’t so solemn and stiff, Uncle, – and said, “Oh! you are the son of Mr Gills the Ships’ Instrument-maker.” “Nephew, Sir,” I said. “I said nephew, boy,” said he. But I could take my oath he said son, Uncle.’

‘You’re mistaken I daresay. It’s no matter.’

‘No, it’s no matter, but he needn’t have been so sharp, I thought. There was no harm in it though he did say son. Then he told me that you had spoken to him about me, and that he had found me employment in the House accordingly, and that I was expected to be attentive and punctual, and then he went away. I thought he didn’t seem to like me much.’

‘You mean, I suppose,’ observed the Instrument-maker, ‘that you didn’t seem to like him much?’

‘Well, Uncle,’ returned the boy, laughing. ‘Perhaps so; I never thought of that.’

Solomon looked a little graver as he finished his dinner, and glanced from time to time at the boy’s bright face. When dinner was done, and the cloth was cleared away (the entertainment had been brought from a neighbouring eating-house), he lighted a candle, and went down below into a little cellar, while his nephew, standing on the mouldy staircase, dutifully held the light. After a moment’s groping here and there, he presently returned with a very ancient-looking bottle, covered with dust and dirt.

‘Why, Uncle Sol!’ said the boy, ‘what are you about? that’s the wonderful Madeira! – there’s only one more bottle!’

Uncle Sol nodded his head, implying that he knew very well what he was about; and having drawn the cork in solemn silence, filled two glasses and set the bottle and a third clean glass on the table.

‘You shall drink the other bottle, Wally,’ he said, ‘when you come to good fortune; when you are a thriving, respected, happy man; when the start in life you have made to-day shall have brought you, as I pray Heaven it may! – to a smooth part of the course you have to run, my child. My love to you!’

Some of the fog that hung about old Sol seemed to have got into his throat; for he spoke huskily. His hand shook too, as he clinked his glass against his nephew’s. But having once got the wine to his lips, he tossed it off like a man, and smacked them afterwards.

‘Dear Uncle,’ said the boy, affecting to make light of it, while the tears stood in his eyes, ‘for the honour you have done me, et cetera, et cetera. I shall now beg to propose Mr Solomon Gills with three times three and one cheer more. Hurrah! and you’ll return thanks, Uncle, when we drink the last bottle together; won’t you?’

They clinked their glasses again; and Walter, who was hoarding his wine, took a sip of it, and held the glass up to his eye with as critical an air as he could possibly assume.

His Uncle sat looking at him for some time in silence. When their eyes at last met, he began at once to pursue the theme that had occupied his thoughts, aloud, as if he had been speaking all the time.

‘You see, Walter,’ he said, ‘in truth this business is merely a habit with me. I am so accustomed to the habit that I could hardly live if I relinquished it: but there’s nothing doing, nothing doing. When that uniform was worn,’ pointing out towards the little Midshipman, ‘then indeed, fortunes were to be made, and were made. But competition, competition – new invention, new invention – alteration, alteration – the world’s gone past me. I hardly know where I am myself, much less where my customers are.’

‘Never mind ‘em, Uncle!’

‘Since you came home from weekly boarding-school at Peckham, for instance – and that’s ten days,’ said Solomon, ‘I don’t remember more than one person that has come into the

shop.'

'Two, Uncle, don't you recollect? There was the man who came to ask for change for a sovereign – '

'That's the one,' said Solomon.

'Why Uncle! don't you call the woman anybody, who came to ask the way to Mile-End Turnpike?'

'Oh! it's true,' said Solomon, 'I forgot her. Two persons.'

'To be sure, they didn't buy anything,' cried the boy.

'No. They didn't buy anything,' said Solomon, quietly.

'Nor want anything,' cried the boy.

'No. If they had, they'd gone to another shop,' said Solomon, in the same tone.

'But there were two of 'em, Uncle,' cried the boy, as if that were a great triumph. 'You said only one.'

'Well, Wally,' resumed the old man, after a short pause: 'not being like the Savages who came on Robinson Crusoe's Island, we can't live on a man who asks for change for a sovereign, and a woman who inquires the way to Mile-End Turnpike. As I said just now, the world has gone past me. I don't blame it; but I no longer understand it. Tradesmen are not the same as they used to be, apprentices are not the same, business is not the same, business commodities are not the same. Seven-eighths of my stock is old-fashioned. I am an old-fashioned man in an old-fashioned shop, in a street that is not the same as I remember it. I have fallen behind the time, and am too old to catch it again. Even the noise it makes a long way ahead, confuses me.'

Walter was going to speak, but his Uncle held up his hand.

'Therefore, Wally – therefore it is that I am anxious you should be early in the busy world, and on the world's track. I am only the ghost of this business – its substance vanished long ago; and when I die, its ghost will be laid. As it is clearly no inheritance for you then, I have thought it best to use for your advantage, almost the only fragment of the old connexion that stands by me, through long habit. Some people suppose me to be wealthy. I wish for your sake they were right. But whatever I leave behind me, or whatever I can give you, you in such a House as Dombey's are in the road to use well and make the most of. Be diligent, try to like it, my dear boy, work for a steady independence, and be happy!'

'I'll do everything I can, Uncle, to deserve your affection. Indeed I will,' said the boy, earnestly.

'I know it,' said Solomon. 'I am sure of it,' and he applied himself to a second glass of the old Madeira, with increased relish. 'As to the Sea,' he pursued, 'that's well enough in fiction, Wally, but it won't do in fact: it won't do at all. It's natural enough that you should think about it, associating it with all these familiar things; but it won't do, it won't do.'

Solomon Gills rubbed his hands with an air of stealthy enjoyment, as he talked of the sea, though; and looked on the seafaring objects about him with inexpressible complacency.

'Think of this wine for instance,' said old Sol, 'which has been to the East Indies and back, I'm not able to say how often, and has been once round the world. Think of the pitch-dark nights,

the roaring winds, and rolling seas:'

'The thunder, lightning, rain, hail, storm of all kinds,' said the boy.

'To be sure,' said Solomon, – 'that this wine has passed through. Think what a straining and creaking of timbers and masts: what a whistling and howling of the gale through ropes and rigging:'

'What a clambering aloft of men, vying with each other who shall lie out first upon the yards to furl the icy sails, while the ship rolls and pitches, like mad!' cried his nephew.

'Exactly so,' said Solomon: 'has gone on, over the old cask that held this wine. Why, when the Charming Sally went down in the – '

'In the Baltic Sea, in the dead of night; five-and-twenty minutes past twelve when the captain's watch stopped in his pocket; he lying dead against the main-mast – on the fourteenth of February, seventeen forty-nine!' cried Walter, with great animation.

'Ay, to be sure!' cried old Sol, 'quite right! Then, there were five hundred casks of such wine aboard; and all hands (except the first mate, first lieutenant, two seamen, and a lady, in a leaky boat) going to work to stave the casks, got drunk and died drunk, singing "Rule Britannia", when she settled and went down, and ending with one awful scream in chorus.'

'But when the George the Second drove ashore, Uncle, on the coast of Cornwall, in a dismal gale, two hours before daybreak,

on the fourth of March, 'seventy-one, she had near two hundred horses aboard; and the horses breaking loose down below, early in the gale, and tearing to and fro, and trampling each other to death, made such noises, and set up such human cries, that the crew believing the ship to be full of devils, some of the best men, losing heart and head, went overboard in despair, and only two were left alive, at last, to tell the tale.'

'And when,' said old Sol, 'when the Polyphemus – '

'Private West India Trader, burden three hundred and fifty tons, Captain, John Brown of Deptford. Owners, Wiggs and Co.,' cried Walter.

'The same,' said Sol; 'when she took fire, four days' sail with a fair wind out of Jamaica Harbour, in the night – '

'There were two brothers on board,' interposed his nephew, speaking very fast and loud, 'and there not being room for both of them in the only boat that wasn't swamped, neither of them would consent to go, until the elder took the younger by the waist, and flung him in. And then the younger, rising in the boat, cried out, "Dear Edward, think of your promised wife at home. I'm only a boy. No one waits at home for me. Leap down into my place!" and flung himself in the sea!'

The kindling eye and heightened colour of the boy, who had risen from his seat in the earnestness of what he said and felt, seemed to remind old Sol of something he had forgotten, or that his encircling mist had hitherto shut out. Instead of proceeding with any more anecdotes, as he had evidently intended but a

moment before, he gave a short dry cough, and said, 'Well! suppose we change the subject.'

The truth was, that the simple-minded Uncle in his secret attraction towards the marvellous and adventurous – of which he was, in some sort, a distant relation, by his trade – had greatly encouraged the same attraction in the nephew; and that everything that had ever been put before the boy to deter him from a life of adventure, had had the usual unaccountable effect of sharpening his taste for it. This is invariable. It would seem as if there never was a book written, or a story told, expressly with the object of keeping boys on shore, which did not lure and charm them to the ocean, as a matter of course.

But an addition to the little party now made its appearance, in the shape of a gentleman in a wide suit of blue, with a hook instead of a hand attached to his right wrist; very bushy black eyebrows; and a thick stick in his left hand, covered all over (like his nose) with knobs. He wore a loose black silk handkerchief round his neck, and such a very large coarse shirt collar, that it looked like a small sail. He was evidently the person for whom the spare wine-glass was intended, and evidently knew it; for having taken off his rough outer coat, and hung up, on a particular peg behind the door, such a hard glazed hat as a sympathetic person's head might ache at the sight of, and which left a red rim round his own forehead as if he had been wearing a tight basin, he brought a chair to where the clean glass was, and sat himself down behind it. He was usually addressed as Captain, this visitor;

and had been a pilot, or a skipper, or a privateersman, or all three perhaps; and was a very salt-looking man indeed.

His face, remarkable for a brown solidity, brightened as he shook hands with Uncle and nephew; but he seemed to be of a laconic disposition, and merely said:

'How goes it?'

'All well,' said Mr Gills, pushing the bottle towards him.

He took it up, and having surveyed and smelt it, said with extraordinary expression:

'The?'

'The,' returned the Instrument-maker.

Upon that he whistled as he filled his glass, and seemed to think they were making holiday indeed.

'Wal'r!' he said, arranging his hair (which was thin) with his hook, and then pointing it at the Instrument-maker, 'Look at him! Love! Honour! And Obey! Overhaul your catechism till you find that passage, and when found turn the leaf down. Success, my boy!'

He was so perfectly satisfied both with his quotation and his reference to it, that he could not help repeating the words again in a low voice, and saying he had forgotten 'em these forty year.

'But I never wanted two or three words in my life that I didn't know where to lay my hand upon 'em, Gills,' he observed. 'It comes of not wasting language as some do.'

The reflection perhaps reminded him that he had better, like young Norval's father, "increase his store." At any rate he became

silent, and remained so, until old Sol went out into the shop to light it up, when he turned to Walter, and said, without any introductory remark: —

'I suppose he could make a clock if he tried?'

'I shouldn't wonder, Captain Cuttle,' returned the boy.

'And it would go!' said Captain Cuttle, making a species of serpent in the air with his hook. 'Lord, how that clock would go!'

For a moment or two he seemed quite lost in contemplating the pace of this ideal timepiece, and sat looking at the boy as if his face were the dial.

'But he's chock-full of science,' he observed, waving his hook towards the stock-in-trade. 'Look'ye here! Here's a collection of 'em. Earth, air, or water. It's all one. Only say where you'll have it. Up in a balloon? There you are. Down in a bell? There you are. D'ye want to put the North Star in a pair of scales and weigh it? He'll do it for you.'

It may be gathered from these remarks that Captain Cuttle's reverence for the stock of instruments was profound, and that his philosophy knew little or no distinction between trading in it and inventing it.

'Ah!' he said, with a sigh, 'it's a fine thing to understand 'em. And yet it's a fine thing not to understand 'em. I hardly know which is best. It's so comfortable to sit here and feel that you might be weighed, measured, magnified, electrified, polarized, played the very devil with: and never know how.'

Nothing short of the wonderful Madeira, combined with the

occasion (which rendered it desirable to improve and expand Walter's mind), could have ever loosened his tongue to the extent of giving utterance to this prodigious oration. He seemed quite amazed himself at the manner in which it opened up to view the sources of the taciturn delight he had had in eating Sunday dinners in that parlour for ten years. Becoming a sadder and a wiser man, he mused and held his peace.

'Come!' cried the subject of this admiration, returning. 'Before you have your glass of grog, Ned, we must finish the bottle.'

'Stand by!' said Ned, filling his glass. 'Give the boy some more.'

'No more, thank'e, Uncle!'

'Yes, yes,' said Sol, 'a little more. We'll finish the bottle, to the House, Ned – Walter's House. Why it may be his House one of these days, in part. Who knows? Sir Richard Whittington married his master's daughter.'

'"Turn again Whittington, Lord Mayor of London, and when you are old you will never depart from it,"' interposed the Captain. 'Wal'r! Overhaul the book, my lad.'

'And although Mr Dombey hasn't a daughter,' Sol began.

'Yes, yes, he has, Uncle,' said the boy, reddening and laughing.

'Has he?' cried the old man. 'Indeed I think he has too.'

'Oh! I know he has,' said the boy. 'Some of 'em were talking about it in the office today. And they do say, Uncle and Captain Cuttle,' lowering his voice, 'that he's taken a dislike to her, and that she's left, unnoticed, among the servants, and that his mind's

so set all the while upon having his son in the House, that although he's only a baby now, he is going to have balances struck oftener than formerly, and the books kept closer than they used to be, and has even been seen (when he thought he wasn't) walking in the Docks, looking at his ships and property and all that, as if he was exulting like, over what he and his son will possess together. That's what they say. Of course, I don't know.'

'He knows all about her already, you see,' said the instrument-maker.

'Nonsense, Uncle,' cried the boy, still reddening and laughing, boy-like. 'How can I help hearing what they tell me?'

'The son's a little in our way at present, I'm afraid, Ned,' said the old man, humouring the joke.

'Very much,' said the Captain.

'Nevertheless, we'll drink him,' pursued Sol. 'So, here's to Dombey and Son.'

'Oh, very well, Uncle,' said the boy, merrily. 'Since you have introduced the mention of her, and have connected me with her and have said that I know all about her, I shall make bold to amend the toast. So here's to Dombey – and Son – and Daughter!'

CHAPTER 5. Paul's Progress and Christening

Little Paul, suffering no contamination from the blood of the Toodles, grew stouter and stronger every day. Every day, too, he was more and more ardently cherished by Miss Tox, whose devotion was so far appreciated by Mr Dombey that he began to regard her as a woman of great natural good sense, whose feelings did her credit and deserved encouragement. He was so lavish of this condescension, that he not only bowed to her, in a particular manner, on several occasions, but even entrusted such stately recognitions of her to his sister as 'pray tell your friend, Louisa, that she is very good,' or 'mention to Miss Tox, Louisa, that I am obliged to her;' specialities which made a deep impression on the lady thus distinguished.

Whether Miss Tox conceived that having been selected by the Fates to welcome the little Dombey before he was born, in Kirby, Beard and Kirby's Best Mixed Pins, it therefore naturally devolved upon her to greet him with all other forms of welcome in all other early stages of his existence – or whether her overflowing goodness induced her to volunteer into the domestic militia as a substitute in some sort for his deceased Mama – or whether she was conscious of any other motives – are questions which in this stage of the Firm's history herself only could have

solved. Nor have they much bearing on the fact (of which there is no doubt), that Miss Tox's constancy and zeal were a heavy discouragement to Richards, who lost flesh hourly under her patronage, and was in some danger of being superintended to death.

Miss Tox was often in the habit of assuring Mrs Chick, that nothing could exceed her interest in all connected with the development of that sweet child; and an observer of Miss Tox's proceedings might have inferred so much without declaratory confirmation. She would preside over the innocent repasts of the young heir, with ineffable satisfaction, almost with an air of joint proprietorship with Richards in the entertainment. At the little ceremonies of the bath and toilette, she assisted with enthusiasm. The administration of infantine doses of physic awakened all the active sympathy of her character; and being on one occasion secreted in a cupboard (whither she had fled in modesty), when Mr Dombey was introduced into the nursery by his sister, to behold his son, in the course of preparation for bed, taking a short walk uphill over Richards's gown, in a short and airy linen jacket, Miss Tox was so transported beyond the ignorant present as to be unable to refrain from crying out, 'Is he not beautiful Mr Dombey! Is he not a Cupid, Sir!' and then almost sinking behind the closet door with confusion and blushes.

'Louisa,' said Mr Dombey, one day, to his sister, 'I really think I must present your friend with some little token, on the occasion of Paul's christening. She has exerted herself so warmly in the

child's behalf from the first, and seems to understand her position so thoroughly (a very rare merit in this world, I am sorry to say), that it would really be agreeable to me to notice her.'

Let it be no detraction from the merits of Miss Tox, to hint that in Mr Dombey's eyes, as in some others that occasionally see the light, they only achieved that mighty piece of knowledge, the understanding of their own position, who showed a fitting reverence for his. It was not so much their merit that they knew themselves, as that they knew him, and bowed low before him.

'My dear Paul,' returned his sister, 'you do Miss Tox but justice, as a man of your penetration was sure, I knew, to do. I believe if there are three words in the English language for which she has a respect amounting almost to veneration, those words are, Dombey and Son.'

'Well,' said Mr Dombey, 'I believe it. It does Miss Tox credit.'

'And as to anything in the shape of a token, my dear Paul,' pursued his sister, 'all I can say is that anything you give Miss Tox will be hoarded and prized, I am sure, like a relic. But there is a way, my dear Paul, of showing your sense of Miss Tox's friendliness in a still more flattering and acceptable manner, if you should be so inclined.'

'How is that?' asked Mr Dombey.

'Godfathers, of course,' continued Mrs Chick, 'are important in point of connexion and influence.'

'I don't know why they should be, to my son,' said Mr Dombey, coldly.

‘Very true, my dear Paul,’ retorted Mrs Chick, with an extraordinary show of animation, to cover the suddenness of her conversion; ‘and spoken like yourself. I might have expected nothing else from you. I might have known that such would have been your opinion. Perhaps;’ here Mrs Chick faltered again, as not quite comfortably feeling her way; ‘perhaps that is a reason why you might have the less objection to allowing Miss Tox to be godmother to the dear thing, if it were only as deputy and proxy for someone else. That it would be received as a great honour and distinction, Paul, I need not say.’

‘Louisa,’ said Mr Dombey, after a short pause, ‘it is not to be supposed – ’

‘Certainly not,’ cried Mrs Chick, hastening to anticipate a refusal, ‘I never thought it was.’

Mr Dombey looked at her impatiently.

‘Don’t flurry me, my dear Paul,’ said his sister; ‘for that destroys me. I am far from strong. I have not been quite myself, since poor dear Fanny departed.’

Mr Dombey glanced at the pocket-handkerchief which his sister applied to her eyes, and resumed:

‘It is not be supposed, I say – ’

‘And I say,’ murmured Mrs Chick, ‘that I never thought it was.’

‘Good Heaven, Louisa!’ said Mr Dombey.

‘No, my dear Paul,’ she remonstrated with tearful dignity, ‘I must really be allowed to speak. I am not so clever, or so reasoning, or so eloquent, or so anything, as you are. I know that

very well. So much the worse for me. But if they were the last words I had to utter – and last words should be very solemn to you and me, Paul, after poor dear Fanny – I would still say I never thought it was. And what is more,' added Mrs Chick with increased dignity, as if she had withheld her crushing argument until now, 'I never did think it was.'

Mr Dombey walked to the window and back again.

'It is not to be supposed, Louisa,' he said (Mrs Chick had nailed her colours to the mast, and repeated 'I know it isn't,' but he took no notice of it), 'but that there are many persons who, supposing that I recognised any claim at all in such a case, have a claim upon me superior to Miss Tox's. But I do not. I recognise no such thing. Paul and myself will be able, when the time comes, to hold our own – the House, in other words, will be able to hold its own, and maintain its own, and hand down its own of itself, and without any such common-place aids. The kind of foreign help which people usually seek for their children, I can afford to despise; being above it, I hope. So that Paul's infancy and childhood pass away well, and I see him becoming qualified without waste of time for the career on which he is destined to enter, I am satisfied. He will make what powerful friends he pleases in after-life, when he is actively maintaining – and extending, if that is possible – the dignity and credit of the Firm. Until then, I am enough for him, perhaps, and all in all. I have no wish that people should step in between us. I would much rather show my sense of the obliging conduct of a deserving

person like your friend. Therefore let it be so; and your husband and myself will do well enough for the other sponsors, I daresay.'

In the course of these remarks, delivered with great majesty and grandeur, Mr Dombey had truly revealed the secret feelings of his breast. An indescribable distrust of anybody stepping in between himself and his son; a haughty dread of having any rival or partner in the boy's respect and deference; a sharp misgiving, recently acquired, that he was not infallible in his power of bending and binding human wills; as sharp a jealousy of any second check or cross; these were, at that time the master keys of his soul. In all his life, he had never made a friend. His cold and distant nature had neither sought one, nor found one. And now, when that nature concentrated its whole force so strongly on a partial scheme of parental interest and ambition, it seemed as if its icy current, instead of being released by this influence, and running clear and free, had thawed for but an instant to admit its burden, and then frozen with it into one unyielding block.

Elevated thus to the godmothership of little Paul, in virtue of her insignificance, Miss Tox was from that hour chosen and appointed to office; and Mr Dombey further signified his pleasure that the ceremony, already long delayed, should take place without further postponement. His sister, who had been far from anticipating so signal a success, withdrew as soon as she could, to communicate it to her best of friends; and Mr Dombey was left alone in his library. He had already laid his hand upon the bellrope to convey his usual summons to Richards, when his

eye fell upon a writing-desk, belonging to his deceased wife, which had been taken, among other things, from a cabinet in her chamber. It was not the first time that his eye had lighted on it He carried the key in his pocket; and he brought it to his table and opened it now – having previously locked the room door – with a well-accustomed hand.

From beneath a leaf of torn and cancelled scraps of paper, he took one letter that remained entire. Involuntarily holding his breath as he opened this document, and 'bating in the stealthy action something of his arrogant demeanour, he sat down, resting his head upon one hand, and read it through.

He read it slowly and attentively, and with a nice particularity to every syllable. Otherwise than as his great deliberation seemed unnatural, and perhaps the result of an effort equally great, he allowed no sign of emotion to escape him. When he had read it through, he folded and refolded it slowly several times, and tore it carefully into fragments. Checking his hand in the act of throwing these away, he put them in his pocket, as if unwilling to trust them even to the chances of being re-united and deciphered; and instead of ringing, as usual, for little Paul, he sat solitary, all the evening, in his cheerless room.

There was anything but solitude in the nursery; for there, Mrs Chick and Miss Tox were enjoying a social evening, so much to the disgust of Miss Susan Nipper, that that young lady embraced every opportunity of making wry faces behind the door. Her feelings were so much excited on the occasion, that she found it

indispensable to afford them this relief, even without having the comfort of any audience or sympathy whatever. As the knight-errants of old relieved their minds by carving their mistress's names in deserts, and wildernesses, and other savage places where there was no probability of there ever being anybody to read them, so did Miss Susan Nipper curl her snub nose into drawers and wardrobes, put away winks of disparagement in cupboards, shed derisive squints into stone pitchers, and contradict and call names out in the passage.

The two interlopers, however, blissfully unconscious of the young lady's sentiments, saw little Paul safe through all the stages of undressing, airy exercise, supper and bed; and then sat down to tea before the fire. The two children now lay, through the good offices of Polly, in one room; and it was not until the ladies were established at their tea-table that, happening to look towards the little beds, they thought of Florence.

'How sound she sleeps!' said Miss Tox.

'Why, you know, my dear, she takes a great deal of exercise in the course of the day,' returned Mrs Chick, 'playing about little Paul so much.'

'She is a curious child,' said Miss Tox.

'My dear,' retorted Mrs Chick, in a low voice: 'Her Mama, all over!'

'In-deed!' said Miss Tox. 'Ah dear me!'

A tone of most extraordinary compassion Miss Tox said it in, though she had no distinct idea why, except that it was expected

of her.

'Florence will never, never, never be a Dombey,' said Mrs Chick, 'not if she lives to be a thousand years old.'

Miss Tox elevated her eyebrows, and was again full of commiseration.

'I quite fret and worry myself about her,' said Mrs Chick, with a sigh of modest merit. 'I really don't see what is to become of her when she grows older, or what position she is to take. She don't gain on her Papa in the least. How can one expect she should, when she is so very unlike a Dombey?'

Miss Tox looked as if she saw no way out of such a cogent argument as that, at all.

'And the child, you see,' said Mrs Chick, in deep confidence, 'has poor dear Fanny's nature. She'll never make an effort in after-life, I'll venture to say. Never! She'll never wind and twine herself about her Papa's heart like – '

'Like the ivy?' suggested Miss Tox.

'Like the ivy,' Mrs Chick assented. 'Never! She'll never glide and nestle into the bosom of her Papa's affections like – the – '

'Startled fawn?' suggested Miss Tox.

'Like the startled fawn,' said Mrs Chick. 'Never! Poor Fanny! Yet, how I loved her!'

'You must not distress yourself, my dear,' said Miss Tox, in a soothing voice. 'Now really! You have too much feeling.'

'We have all our faults,' said Mrs Chick, weeping and shaking her head. 'I daresay we have. I never was blind to hers. I never

said I was. Far from it. Yet how I loved her!'

What a satisfaction it was to Mrs Chick – a common-place piece of folly enough, compared with whom her sister-in-law had been a very angel of womanly intelligence and gentleness – to patronise and be tender to the memory of that lady: in exact pursuance of her conduct to her in her lifetime: and to thoroughly believe herself, and take herself in, and make herself uncommonly comfortable on the strength of her toleration! What a mighty pleasant virtue toleration should be when we are right, to be so very pleasant when we are wrong, and quite unable to demonstrate how we come to be invested with the privilege of exercising it!

Mrs Chick was yet drying her eyes and shaking her head, when Richards made bold to caution her that Miss Florence was awake and sitting in her bed. She had risen, as the nurse said, and the lashes of her eyes were wet with tears. But no one saw them glistening save Polly. No one else leant over her, and whispered soothing words to her, or was near enough to hear the flutter of her beating heart.

'Oh! dear nurse!' said the child, looking earnestly up in her face, 'let me lie by my brother!'

'Why, my pet?' said Richards.

'Oh! I think he loves me,' cried the child wildly. 'Let me lie by him. Pray do!'

Mrs Chick interposed with some motherly words about going to sleep like a dear, but Florence repeated her supplication, with

a frightened look, and in a voice broken by sobs and tears.

'I'll not wake him,' she said, covering her face and hanging down her head. 'I'll only touch him with my hand, and go to sleep. Oh, pray, pray, let me lie by my brother to-night, for I believe he's fond of me!'

Richards took her without a word, and carrying her to the little bed in which the infant was sleeping, laid her down by his side. She crept as near him as she could without disturbing his rest; and stretching out one arm so that it timidly embraced his neck, and hiding her face on the other, over which her damp and scattered hair fell loose, lay motionless.

'Poor little thing,' said Miss Tox; 'she has been dreaming, I daresay.'

Dreaming, perhaps, of loving tones for ever silent, of loving eyes for ever closed, of loving arms again wound round her, and relaxing in that dream within the dam which no tongue can relate. Seeking, perhaps – in dreams – some natural comfort for a heart, deeply and sorely wounded, though so young a child's: and finding it, perhaps, in dreams, if not in waking, cold, substantial truth. This trivial incident had so interrupted the current of conversation, that it was difficult of resumption; and Mrs Chick moreover had been so affected by the contemplation of her own tolerant nature, that she was not in spirits. The two friends accordingly soon made an end of their tea, and a servant was despatched to fetch a hackney cabriolet for Miss Tox. Miss Tox had great experience in hackney cabs, and her starting in one was

generally a work of time, as she was systematic in the preparatory arrangements.

'Have the goodness, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'first of all, to carry out a pen and ink and take his number legibly.'

'Yes, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'Then, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'have the goodness to turn the cushion. Which,' said Miss Tox apart to Mrs Chick, 'is generally damp, my dear.'

'Yes, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'I'll trouble you also, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'with this card and this shilling. He's to drive to the card, and is to understand that he will not on any account have more than the shilling.'

'No, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'And – I'm sorry to give you so much trouble, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, looking at him pensively.

'Not at all, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'Mention to the man, then, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'that the lady's uncle is a magistrate, and that if he gives her any of his impertinence he will be punished terribly. You can pretend to say that, if you please, Towlinson, in a friendly way, and because you know it was done to another man, who died.'

'Certainly, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'And now good-night to my sweet, sweet, sweet, godson,' said Miss Tox, with a soft shower of kisses at each repetition of the

adjective; 'and Louisa, my dear friend, promise me to take a little something warm before you go to bed, and not to distress yourself!'

It was with extreme difficulty that Nipper, the black-eyed, who looked on steadfastly, contained herself at this crisis, and until the subsequent departure of Mrs Chick. But the nursery being at length free of visitors, she made herself some recompense for her late restraint.

'You might keep me in a strait-waistcoat for six weeks,' said Nipper, 'and when I got it off I'd only be more aggravated, who ever heard the like of them two Griffins, Mrs Richards?'

'And then to talk of having been dreaming, poor dear!' said Polly.

'Oh you beauties!' cried Susan Nipper, affecting to salute the door by which the ladies had departed. 'Never be a Dombey won't she? It's to be hoped she won't, we don't want any more such, one's enough.'

'Don't wake the children, Susan dear,' said Polly.

'I'm very much beholden to you, Mrs Richards,' said Susan, who was not by any means discriminating in her wrath, 'and really feel it as a honour to receive your commands, being a black slave and a mulotter. Mrs Richards, if there's any other orders, you can give me, pray mention 'em.'

'Nonsense; orders,' said Polly.

'Oh! bless your heart, Mrs Richards,' cried Susan, 'temporaries always orders permanencies here, didn't you know

that, why wherever was you born, Mrs Richards? But wherever you was born, Mrs Richards,' pursued Spitfire, shaking her head resolutely, 'and whenever, and however (which is best known to yourself), you may bear in mind, please, that it's one thing to give orders, and quite another thing to take 'em. A person may tell a person to dive off a bridge head foremost into five-and-forty feet of water, Mrs Richards, but a person may be very far from diving.'

'There now,' said Polly, 'you're angry because you're a good little thing, and fond of Miss Florence; and yet you turn round on me, because there's nobody else.'

'It's very easy for some to keep their tempers, and be soft-spoken, Mrs Richards,' returned Susan, slightly mollified, 'when their child's made as much of as a prince, and is petted and patted till it wishes its friends further, but when a sweet young pretty innocent, that never ought to have a cross word spoken to or of it, is rundown, the case is very different indeed. My goodness gracious me, Miss Floy, you naughty, sinful child, if you don't shut your eyes this minute, I'll call in them hobgoblins that lives in the cock-loft to come and eat you up alive!'

Here Miss Nipper made a horrible lowing, supposed to issue from a conscientious goblin of the bull species, impatient to discharge the severe duty of his position. Having further composed her young charge by covering her head with the bedclothes, and making three or four angry dabs at the pillow, she folded her arms, and screwed up her mouth, and sat looking

at the fire for the rest of the evening.

Though little Paul was said, in nursery phrase, 'to take a deal of notice for his age,' he took as little notice of all this as of the preparations for his christening on the next day but one; which nevertheless went on about him, as to his personal apparel, and that of his sister and the two nurses, with great activity. Neither did he, on the arrival of the appointed morning, show any sense of its importance; being, on the contrary, unusually inclined to sleep, and unusually inclined to take it ill in his attendants that they dressed him to go out.

It happened to be an iron-grey autumnal day, with a shrewd east wind blowing – a day in keeping with the proceedings. Mr Dombey represented in himself the wind, the shade, and the autumn of the christening. He stood in his library to receive the company, as hard and cold as the weather; and when he looked out through the glass room, at the trees in the little garden, their brown and yellow leaves came fluttering down, as if he blighted them.

Ugh! They were black, cold rooms; and seemed to be in mourning, like the inmates of the house. The books precisely matched as to size, and drawn up in line, like soldiers, looked in their cold, hard, slippery uniforms, as if they had but one idea among them, and that was a freezer. The bookcase, glazed and locked, repudiated all familiarities. Mr Pitt, in bronze, on the top, with no trace of his celestial origin about him, guarded the unattainable treasure like an enchanted Moor. A dusty urn

at each high corner, dug up from an ancient tomb, preached desolation and decay, as from two pulpits; and the chimney-glass, reflecting Mr Dombey and his portrait at one blow, seemed fraught with melancholy meditations.

The stiff and stark fire-irons appeared to claim a nearer relationship than anything else there to Mr Dombey, with his buttoned coat, his white cravat, his heavy gold watch-chain, and his creaking boots. But this was before the arrival of Mr and Mrs Chick, his lawful relatives, who soon presented themselves.

'My dear Paul,' Mrs Chick murmured, as she embraced him, 'the beginning, I hope, of many joyful days!'

'Thank you, Louisa,' said Mr Dombey, grimly. 'How do you do, Mr John?'

'How do you do, Sir?' said Chick.

He gave Mr Dombey his hand, as if he feared it might electrify him. Mr Dombey took it as if it were a fish, or seaweed, or some such clammy substance, and immediately returned it to him with exalted politeness.

'Perhaps, Louisa,' said Mr Dombey, slightly turning his head in his cravat, as if it were a socket, 'you would have preferred a fire?'

'Oh, my dear Paul, no,' said Mrs Chick, who had much ado to keep her teeth from chattering; 'not for me.'

'Mr John,' said Mr Dombey, 'you are not sensible of any chill?'

Mr John, who had already got both his hands in his pockets over the wrists, and was on the very threshold of that same canine

chorus which had given Mrs Chick so much offence on a former occasion, protested that he was perfectly comfortable.

He added in a low voice, 'With my tiddle tol toor rul' – when he was providentially stopped by Towlinson, who announced:

'Miss Tox!'

And enter that fair enslaver, with a blue nose and indescribably frosty face, referable to her being very thinly clad in a maze of fluttering odds and ends, to do honour to the ceremony.

'How do you do, Miss Tox?' said Mr Dombey.

Miss Tox, in the midst of her spreading gauzes, went down altogether like an opera-glass shutting-up; she curtseyed so low, in acknowledgment of Mr Dombey's advancing a step or two to meet her.

'I can never forget this occasion, Sir,' said Miss Tox, softly. "'Tis impossible. My dear Louisa, I can hardly believe the evidence of my senses.'

If Miss Tox could believe the evidence of one of her senses, it was a very cold day. That was quite clear. She took an early opportunity of promoting the circulation in the tip of her nose by secretly chafing it with her pocket handkerchief, lest, by its very low temperature, it should disagreeably astonish the baby when she came to kiss it.

The baby soon appeared, carried in great glory by Richards; while Florence, in custody of that active young constable, Susan Nipper, brought up the rear. Though the whole nursery party were dressed by this time in lighter mourning than at first, there

was enough in the appearance of the bereaved children to make the day no brighter. The baby too – it might have been Miss Tox's nose – began to cry. Thereby, as it happened, preventing Mr Chick from the awkward fulfilment of a very honest purpose he had; which was, to make much of Florence. For this gentleman, insensible to the superior claims of a perfect Dombey (perhaps on account of having the honour to be united to a Dombey himself, and being familiar with excellence), really liked her, and showed that he liked her, and was about to show it in his own way now, when Paul cried, and his helpmate stopped him short —

'Now Florence, child!' said her aunt, briskly, 'what are you doing, love? Show yourself to him. Engage his attention, my dear!'

The atmosphere became or might have become colder and colder, when Mr Dombey stood frigidly watching his little daughter, who, clapping her hands, and standing on tip-toe before the throne of his son and heir, lured him to bend down from his high estate, and look at her. Some honest act of Richards's may have aided the effect, but he did look down, and held his peace. As his sister hid behind her nurse, he followed her with his eyes; and when she peeped out with a merry cry to him, he sprang up and crowed lustily – laughing outright when she ran in upon him; and seeming to fondle her curls with his tiny hands, while she smothered him with kisses.

Was Mr Dombey pleased to see this? He testified no pleasure by the relaxation of a nerve; but outward tokens of any kind of

feeling were unusual with him. If any sunbeam stole into the room to light the children at their play, it never reached his face. He looked on so fixedly and coldly, that the warm light vanished even from the laughing eyes of little Florence, when, at last, they happened to meet his.

It was a dull, grey, autumn day indeed, and in a minute's pause and silence that took place, the leaves fell sorrowfully.

'Mr John,' said Mr Dombey, referring to his watch, and assuming his hat and gloves. 'Take my sister, if you please: my arm today is Miss Tox's. You had better go first with Master Paul, Richards. Be very careful.'

In Mr Dombey's carriage, Dombey and Son, Miss Tox, Mrs Chick, Richards, and Florence. In a little carriage following it, Susan Nipper and the owner Mr Chick. Susan looking out of window, without intermission, as a relief from the embarrassment of confronting the large face of that gentleman, and thinking whenever anything rattled that he was putting up in paper an appropriate pecuniary compliment for herself.

Once upon the road to church, Mr Dombey clapped his hands for the amusement of his son. At which instance of parental enthusiasm Miss Tox was enchanted. But exclusive of this incident, the chief difference between the christening party and a party in a mourning coach consisted in the colours of the carriage and horses.

Arrived at the church steps, they were received by a portentous beadle. Mr Dombey dismounting first to help the ladies out, and

standing near him at the church door, looked like another beadle. A beadle less gorgeous but more dreadful; the beadle of private life; the beadle of our business and our bosoms.

Miss Tox's hand trembled as she slipped it through Mr Dombey's arm, and felt herself escorted up the steps, preceded by a cocked hat and a Babylonian collar. It seemed for a moment like that other solemn institution, 'Wilt thou have this man, Lucretia?' 'Yes, I will.'

'Please to bring the child in quick out of the air there,' whispered the beadle, holding open the inner door of the church.

Little Paul might have asked with Hamlet 'into my grave?' so chill and earthy was the place. The tall, shrouded pulpit and reading desk; the dreary perspective of empty pews stretching away under the galleries, and empty benches mounting to the roof and lost in the shadow of the great grim organ; the dusty matting and cold stone slabs; the grisly free seats in the aisles; and the damp corner by the bell-rope, where the black trestles used for funerals were stowed away, along with some shovels and baskets, and a coil or two of deadly-looking rope; the strange, unusual, uncomfortable smell, and the cadaverous light; were all in unison. It was a cold and dismal scene.

'There's a wedding just on, Sir,' said the beadle, 'but it'll be over directly, if you'll walk into the westry here.'

Before he turned again to lead the way, he gave Mr Dombey a bow and a half smile of recognition, importing that he (the beadle) remembered to have had the pleasure of attending on

him when he buried his wife, and hoped he had enjoyed himself since.

The very wedding looked dismal as they passed in front of the altar. The bride was too old and the bridegroom too young, and a superannuated beau with one eye and an eyeglass stuck in its blank companion, was giving away the lady, while the friends were shivering. In the vestry the fire was smoking; and an over-aged and over-worked and under-paid attorney's clerk, 'making a search,' was running his forefinger down the parchment pages of an immense register (one of a long series of similar volumes) gorged with burials. Over the fireplace was a ground-plan of the vaults underneath the church; and Mr Chick, skimming the literary portion of it aloud, by way of enlivening the company, read the reference to Mrs Dombey's tomb in full, before he could stop himself.

After another cold interval, a wheezy little pew-opener afflicted with an asthma, appropriate to the churchyard, if not to the church, summoned them to the font – a rigid marble basin which seemed to have been playing a churchyard game at cup and ball with its matter of fact pedestal, and to have been just that moment caught on the top of it. Here they waited some little time while the marriage party enrolled themselves; and meanwhile the wheezy little pew-opener – partly in consequence of her infirmity, and partly that the marriage party might not forget her – went about the building coughing like a grampus.

Presently the clerk (the only cheerful-looking object there,

and he was an undertaker) came up with a jug of warm water, and said something, as he poured it into the font, about taking the chill off; which millions of gallons boiling hot could not have done for the occasion. Then the clergyman, an amiable and mild-looking young curate, but obviously afraid of the baby, appeared like the principal character in a ghost-story, 'a tall figure all in white;' at sight of whom Paul rent the air with his cries, and never left off again till he was taken out black in the face.

Even when that event had happened, to the great relief of everybody, he was heard under the portico, during the rest of the ceremony, now fainter, now louder, now hushed, now bursting forth again with an irrepressible sense of his wrongs. This so distracted the attention of the two ladies, that Mrs Chick was constantly deploying into the centre aisle, to send out messages by the pew-opener, while Miss Tox kept her Prayer-book open at the Gunpowder Plot, and occasionally read responses from that service.

During the whole of these proceedings, Mr Dombey remained as impassive and gentlemanly as ever, and perhaps assisted in making it so cold, that the young curate smoked at the mouth as he read. The only time that he unbent his visage in the least, was when the clergyman, in delivering (very unaffectedly and simply) the closing exhortation, relative to the future examination of the child by the sponsors, happened to rest his eye on Mr Chick; and then Mr Dombey might have been seen to express by a majestic look, that he would like to catch him at it.

It might have been well for Mr Dombey, if he had thought of his own dignity a little less; and had thought of the great origin and purpose of the ceremony in which he took so formal and so stiff a part, a little more. His arrogance contrasted strangely with its history.

When it was all over, he again gave his arm to Miss Tox, and conducted her to the vestry, where he informed the clergyman how much pleasure it would have given him to have solicited the honour of his company at dinner, but for the unfortunate state of his household affairs. The register signed, and the fees paid, and the pew-opener (whose cough was very bad again) remembered, and the beadle gratified, and the sexton (who was accidentally on the doorsteps, looking with great interest at the weather) not forgotten, they got into the carriage again, and drove home in the same bleak fellowship.

There they found Mr Pitt turning up his nose at a cold collation, set forth in a cold pomp of glass and silver, and looking more like a dead dinner lying in state than a social refreshment. On their arrival Miss Tox produced a mug for her godson, and Mr Chick a knife and fork and spoon in a case. Mr Dombey also produced a bracelet for Miss Tox; and, on the receipt of this token, Miss Tox was tenderly affected.

'Mr John,' said Mr Dombey, 'will you take the bottom of the table, if you please? What have you got there, Mr John?'

'I have got a cold fillet of veal here, Sir,' replied Mr Chick, rubbing his numbed hands hard together. 'What have you got

there, Sir?'

'This,' returned Mr Dombey, 'is some cold preparation of calf's head, I think. I see cold fowls – ham – patties – salad – lobster. Miss Tox will do me the honour of taking some wine? Champagne to Miss Tox.'

There was a toothache in everything. The wine was so bitter cold that it forced a little scream from Miss Tox, which she had great difficulty in turning into a 'Hem!' The veal had come from such an airy pantry, that the first taste of it had struck a sensation as of cold lead to Mr Chick's extremities. Mr Dombey alone remained unmoved. He might have been hung up for sale at a Russian fair as a specimen of a frozen gentleman.

The prevailing influence was too much even for his sister. She made no effort at flattery or small talk, and directed all her efforts to looking as warm as she could.

'Well, Sir,' said Mr Chick, making a desperate plunge, after a long silence, and filling a glass of sherry; 'I shall drink this, if you'll allow me, Sir, to little Paul.'

'Bless him!' murmured Miss Tox, taking a sip of wine.

'Dear little Dombey!' murmured Mrs Chick.

'Mr John,' said Mr Dombey, with severe gravity, 'my son would feel and express himself obliged to you, I have no doubt, if he could appreciate the favour you have done him. He will prove, in time to come, I trust, equal to any responsibility that the obliging disposition of his relations and friends, in private, or the onerous nature of our position, in public, may impose upon him.'

The tone in which this was said admitting of nothing more, Mr Chick relapsed into low spirits and silence. Not so Miss Tox, who, having listened to Mr Dombey with even a more emphatic attention than usual, and with a more expressive tendency of her head to one side, now leant across the table, and said to Mrs Chick softly:

'Louisa!'

'My dear,' said Mrs Chick.

'Onerous nature of our position in public may – I have forgotten the exact term.'

'Expose him to,' said Mrs Chick.

'Pardon me, my dear,' returned Miss Tox, 'I think not. It was more rounded and flowing. Obliging disposition of relations and friends in private, or onerous nature of position in public – may – impose upon him!'

'Impose upon him, to be sure,' said Mrs Chick.

Miss Tox struck her delicate hands together lightly, in triumph; and added, casting up her eyes, 'eloquence indeed!'

Mr Dombey, in the meanwhile, had issued orders for the attendance of Richards, who now entered curtseying, but without the baby; Paul being asleep after the fatigues of the morning. Mr Dombey, having delivered a glass of wine to this vassal, addressed her in the following words: Miss Tox previously settling her head on one side, and making other little arrangements for engraving them on her heart.

'During the six months or so, Richards, which have seen you

an inmate of this house, you have done your duty. Desiring to connect some little service to you with this occasion, I considered how I could best effect that object, and I also advised with my sister, Mrs – '

'Chick,' interposed the gentleman of that name.

'Oh, hush if you please!' said Miss Tox.

'I was about to say to you, Richards,' resumed Mr Dombey, with an appalling glance at Mr John, 'that I was further assisted in my decision, by the recollection of a conversation I held with your husband in this room, on the occasion of your being hired, when he disclosed to me the melancholy fact that your family, himself at the head, were sunk and steeped in ignorance.'

Richards quailed under the magnificence of the reproof.

'I am far from being friendly,' pursued Mr Dombey, 'to what is called by persons of levelling sentiments, general education. But it is necessary that the inferior classes should continue to be taught to know their position, and to conduct themselves properly. So far I approve of schools. Having the power of nominating a child on the foundation of an ancient establishment, called (from a worshipful company) the Charitable Grinders; where not only is a wholesome education bestowed upon the scholars, but where a dress and badge is likewise provided for them; I have (first communicating, through Mrs Chick, with your family) nominated your eldest son to an existing vacancy; and he has this day, I am informed, assumed the habit. The number of her son, I believe,' said Mr Dombey, turning to his sister

and speaking of the child as if he were a hackney-coach, is one hundred and forty-seven. Louisa, you can tell her.'

'One hundred and forty-seven,' said Mrs Chick 'The dress, Richards, is a nice, warm, blue baize tailed coat and cap, turned up with orange coloured binding; red worsted stockings; and very strong leather small-clothes. One might wear the articles one's self,' said Mrs Chick, with enthusiasm, 'and be grateful.'

'There, Richards!' said Miss Tox. 'Now, indeed, you may be proud. The Charitable Grinders!'

'I am sure I am very much obliged, Sir,' returned Richards faintly, 'and take it very kind that you should remember my little ones.' At the same time a vision of Biler as a Charitable Grinder, with his very small legs encased in the serviceable clothing described by Mrs Chick, swam before Richards's eyes, and made them water.

'I am very glad to see you have so much feeling, Richards,' said Miss Tox.

'It makes one almost hope, it really does,' said Mrs Chick, who prided herself on taking trustful views of human nature, 'that there may yet be some faint spark of gratitude and right feeling in the world.'

Richards deferred to these compliments by curtseying and murmuring her thanks; but finding it quite impossible to recover her spirits from the disorder into which they had been thrown by the image of her son in his precocious nether garments, she gradually approached the door and was heartily relieved to

escape by it.

Such temporary indications of a partial thaw that had appeared with her, vanished with her; and the frost set in again, as cold and hard as ever. Mr Chick was twice heard to hum a tune at the bottom of the table, but on both occasions it was a fragment of the Dead March in Saul. The party seemed to get colder and colder, and to be gradually resolving itself into a congealed and solid state, like the collation round which it was assembled. At length Mrs Chick looked at Miss Tox, and Miss Tox returned the look, and they both rose and said it was really time to go. Mr Dombey receiving this announcement with perfect equanimity, they took leave of that gentleman, and presently departed under the protection of Mr Chick; who, when they had turned their backs upon the house and left its master in his usual solitary state, put his hands in his pockets, threw himself back in the carriage, and whistled 'With a hey ho chevy!' all through; conveying into his face as he did so, an expression of such gloomy and terrible defiance, that Mrs Chick dared not protest, or in any way molest him.

Richards, though she had little Paul on her lap, could not forget her own first-born. She felt it was ungrateful; but the influence of the day fell even on the Charitable Grinders, and she could hardly help regarding his pewter badge, number one hundred and forty-seven, as, somehow, a part of its formality and sternness. She spoke, too, in the nursery, of his 'blessed legs,' and was again troubled by his spectre in uniform.

‘I don’t know what I wouldn’t give,’ said Polly, ‘to see the poor little dear before he gets used to ‘em.’

‘Why, then, I tell you what, Mrs Richards,’ retorted Nipper, who had been admitted to her confidence, ‘see him and make your mind easy.’

‘Mr Dombey wouldn’t like it,’ said Polly.

‘Oh, wouldn’t he, Mrs Richards!’ retorted Nipper, ‘he’d like it very much, I think when he was asked.’

‘You wouldn’t ask him, I suppose, at all?’ said Polly.

‘No, Mrs Richards, quite contrairy,’ returned Susan, ‘and them two inspectors Tox and Chick, not intending to be on duty tomorrow, as I heard ‘em say, me and Miss Floy will go along with you tomorrow morning, and welcome, Mrs Richards, if you like, for we may as well walk there as up and down a street, and better too.’

Polly rejected the idea pretty stoutly at first; but by little and little she began to entertain it, as she entertained more and more distinctly the forbidden pictures of her children, and her own home. At length, arguing that there could be no great harm in calling for a moment at the door, she yielded to the Nipper proposition.

The matter being settled thus, little Paul began to cry most piteously, as if he had a foreboding that no good would come of it.

‘What’s the matter with the child?’ asked Susan.

‘He’s cold, I think,’ said Polly, walking with him to and fro,

and hushing him.

It was a bleak autumnal afternoon indeed; and as she walked, and hushed, and, glancing through the dreary windows, pressed the little fellow closer to her breast, the withered leaves came showering down.

CHAPTER 6. Paul's Second Deprivation

Polly was beset by so many misgivings in the morning, that but for the incessant promptings of her black-eyed companion, she would have abandoned all thoughts of the expedition, and formally petitioned for leave to see number one hundred and forty-seven, under the awful shadow of Mr Dombey's roof. But Susan who was personally disposed in favour of the excursion, and who (like Tony Lumpkin), if she could bear the disappointments of other people with tolerable fortitude, could not abide to disappoint herself, threw so many ingenious doubts in the way of this second thought, and stimulated the original intention with so many ingenious arguments, that almost as soon as Mr Dombey's stately back was turned, and that gentleman was pursuing his daily road towards the City, his unconscious son was on his way to Staggs's Gardens.

This euphonious locality was situated in a suburb, known by the inhabitants of Staggs's Gardens by the name of Camberling Town; a designation which the Strangers' Map of London, as printed (with a view to pleasant and commodious reference) on pocket handkerchiefs, condenses, with some show of reason, into Camden Town. Hither the two nurses bent their steps, accompanied by their charges; Richards carrying Paul, of course,

and Susan leading little Florence by the hand, and giving her such jerks and pokes from time to time, as she considered it wholesome to administer.

The first shock of a great earthquake had, just at that period, rent the whole neighbourhood to its centre. Traces of its course were visible on every side. Houses were knocked down; streets broken through and stopped; deep pits and trenches dug in the ground; enormous heaps of earth and clay thrown up; buildings that were undermined and shaking, propped by great beams of wood. Here, a chaos of carts, overthrown and jumbled together, lay topsy-turvy at the bottom of a steep unnatural hill; there, confused treasures of iron soaked and rusted in something that had accidentally become a pond. Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassable; Babel towers of chimneys, wanting half their height; temporary wooden houses and enclosures, in the most unlikely situations; carcases of ragged tenements, and fragments of unfinished walls and arches, and piles of scaffolding, and wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing. There were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream. Hot springs and fiery eruptions, the usual attendants upon earthquakes, lent their contributions of confusion to the scene. Boiling water hissed and heaved within dilapidated walls; whence, also, the glare and roar

of flames came issuing forth; and mounds of ashes blocked up rights of way, and wholly changed the law and custom of the neighbourhood.

In short, the yet unfinished and unopened Railroad was in progress; and, from the very core of all this dire disorder, trailed smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilisation and improvement.

But as yet, the neighbourhood was shy to own the Railroad. One or two bold speculators had projected streets; and one had built a little, but had stopped among the mud and ashes to consider farther of it. A bran-new Tavern, redolent of fresh mortar and size, and fronting nothing at all, had taken for its sign The Railway Arms; but that might be rash enterprise – and then it hoped to sell drink to the workmen. So, the Excavators' House of Call had sprung up from a beer-shop; and the old-established Ham and Beef Shop had become the Railway Eating House, with a roast leg of pork daily, through interested motives of a similar immediate and popular description. Lodging-house keepers were favourable in like manner; and for the like reasons were not to be trusted. The general belief was very slow. There were frowzy fields, and cow-houses, and dunghills, and dustheaps, and ditches, and gardens, and summer-houses, and carpet-beating grounds, at the very door of the Railway. Little tumuli of oyster shells in the oyster season, and of lobster shells in the lobster season, and of broken crockery and faded cabbage leaves in all seasons, encroached upon its high places. Posts, and

rails, and old cautions to trespassers, and backs of mean houses, and patches of wretched vegetation, stared it out of countenance. Nothing was the better for it, or thought of being so. If the miserable waste ground lying near it could have laughed, it would have laughed it to scorn, like many of the miserable neighbours.

Staggs's Gardens was uncommonly incredulous. It was a little row of houses, with little squalid patches of ground before them, fenced off with old doors, barrel staves, scraps of tarpaulin, and dead bushes; with bottomless tin kettles and exhausted iron fenders, thrust into the gaps. Here, the Staggs's Gardeners trained scarlet beans, kept fowls and rabbits, erected rotten summer-houses (one was an old boat), dried clothes, and smoked pipes. Some were of opinion that Staggs's Gardens derived its name from a deceased capitalist, one Mr Staggs, who had built it for his delectation. Others, who had a natural taste for the country, held that it dated from those rural times when the antlered herd, under the familiar denomination of Staggses, had resorted to its shady precincts. Be this as it may, Staggs's Gardens was regarded by its population as a sacred grove not to be withered by Railroads; and so confident were they generally of its long outliving any such ridiculous inventions, that the master chimney-sweeper at the corner, who was understood to take the lead in the local politics of the Gardens, had publicly declared that on the occasion of the Railroad opening, if ever it did open, two of his boys should ascend the flues of his dwelling, with instructions to hail the failure with derisive cheers from the chimney-pots.

To this unhallowed spot, the very name of which had hitherto been carefully concealed from Mr Dombey by his sister, was little Paul now borne by Fate and Richards

'That's my house, Susan,' said Polly, pointing it out.

'Is it, indeed, Mrs Richards?' said Susan, condescendingly.

'And there's my sister Jemima at the door, I do declare' cried Polly, 'with my own sweet precious baby in her arms!'

The sight added such an extensive pair of wings to Polly's impatience, that she set off down the Gardens at a run, and bouncing on Jemima, changed babies with her in a twinkling; to the unutterable astonishment of that young damsel, on whom the heir of the Dombeys seemed to have fallen from the clouds.

'Why, Polly!' cried Jemima. 'You! what a turn you have given me! who'd have thought it! come along in Polly! How well you do look to be sure! The children will go half wild to see you Polly, that they will.'

That they did, if one might judge from the noise they made, and the way in which they dashed at Polly and dragged her to a low chair in the chimney corner, where her own honest apple face became immediately the centre of a bunch of smaller pippins, all laying their rosy cheeks close to it, and all evidently the growth of the same tree. As to Polly, she was full as noisy and vehement as the children; and it was not until she was quite out of breath, and her hair was hanging all about her flushed face, and her new christening attire was very much dishevelled, that any pause took place in the confusion. Even then, the smallest Toodle but one

remained in her lap, holding on tight with both arms round her neck; while the smallest Toodle but two mounted on the back of the chair, and made desperate efforts, with one leg in the air, to kiss her round the corner.

'Look! there's a pretty little lady come to see you,' said Polly; 'and see how quiet she is! what a beautiful little lady, ain't she?'

This reference to Florence, who had been standing by the door not unobservant of what passed, directed the attention of the younger branches towards her; and had likewise the happy effect of leading to the formal recognition of Miss Nipper, who was not quite free from a misgiving that she had been already slighted.

'Oh do come in and sit down a minute, Susan, please,' said Polly. 'This is my sister Jemima, this is. Jemima, I don't know what I should ever do with myself, if it wasn't for Susan Nipper; I shouldn't be here now but for her.'

'Oh do sit down, Miss Nipper, if you please,' quoth Jemima.

Susan took the extreme corner of a chair, with a stately and ceremonious aspect.

'I never was so glad to see anybody in all my life; now really I never was, Miss Nipper,' said Jemima.

Susan relaxing, took a little more of the chair, and smiled graciously.

'Do untie your bonnet-strings, and make yourself at home, Miss Nipper, please,' entreated Jemima. 'I am afraid it's a poorer place than you're used to; but you'll make allowances, I'm sure.'

The black-eyed was so softened by this deferential behaviour,

that she caught up little Miss Toodle who was running past, and took her to Banbury Cross immediately.

'But where's my pretty boy?' said Polly. 'My poor fellow? I came all this way to see him in his new clothes.'

'Ah what a pity!' cried Jemima. 'He'll break his heart, when he hears his mother has been here. He's at school, Polly.'

'Gone already!'

'Yes. He went for the first time yesterday, for fear he should lose any learning. But it's half-holiday, Polly: if you could only stop till he comes home – you and Miss Nipper, leastways,' said Jemima, mindful in good time of the dignity of the black-eyed.

'And how does he look, Jemima, bless him!' faltered Polly.

'Well, really he don't look so bad as you'd suppose,' returned Jemima.

'Ah!' said Polly, with emotion, 'I knew his legs must be too short.'

'His legs is short,' returned Jemima; 'especially behind; but they'll get longer, Polly, every day.'

It was a slow, prospective kind of consolation; but the cheerfulness and good nature with which it was administered, gave it a value it did not intrinsically possess. After a moment's silence, Polly asked, in a more sprightly manner:

'And where's Father, Jemima dear?' – for by that patriarchal appellation, Mr Toodle was generally known in the family.

'There again!' said Jemima. 'What a pity! Father took his dinner with him this morning, and isn't coming home till night.

But he's always talking of you, Polly, and telling the children about you; and is the peaceablest, patientest, best-temperedest soul in the world, as he always was and will be!'

'Thankee, Jemima,' cried the simple Polly; delighted by the speech, and disappointed by the absence.

'Oh you needn't thank me, Polly,' said her sister, giving her a sounding kiss upon the cheek, and then dancing little Paul cheerfully. 'I say the same of you sometimes, and think it too.'

In spite of the double disappointment, it was impossible to regard in the light of a failure a visit which was greeted with such a reception; so the sisters talked hopefully about family matters, and about Biler, and about all his brothers and sisters: while the black-eyed, having performed several journeys to Banbury Cross and back, took sharp note of the furniture, the Dutch clock, the cupboard, the castle on the mantel-piece with red and green windows in it, susceptible of illumination by a candle-end within; and the pair of small black velvet kittens, each with a lady's reticule in its mouth; regarded by the Staggs's Gardeners as prodigies of imitative art. The conversation soon becoming general lest the black-eyed should go off at score and turn sarcastic, that young lady related to Jemima a summary of everything she knew concerning Mr Dombey, his prospects, family, pursuits, and character. Also an exact inventory of her personal wardrobe, and some account of her principal relations and friends. Having relieved her mind of these disclosures, she partook of shrimps and porter, and evinced a disposition to swear

eternal friendship.

Little Florence herself was not behind-hand in improving the occasion; for, being conducted forth by the young Toodles to inspect some toad-stools and other curiosities of the Gardens, she entered with them, heart and soul, on the formation of a temporary breakwater across a small green pool that had collected in a corner. She was still busily engaged in that labour, when sought and found by Susan; who, such was her sense of duty, even under the humanizing influence of shrimps, delivered a moral address to her (punctuated with thumps) on her degenerate nature, while washing her face and hands; and predicted that she would bring the grey hairs of her family in general, with sorrow to the grave. After some delay, occasioned by a pretty long confidential interview above stairs on pecuniary subjects, between Polly and Jemima, an interchange of babies was again effected – for Polly had all this time retained her own child, and Jemima little Paul – and the visitors took leave.

But first the young Toodles, victims of a pious fraud, were deluded into repairing in a body to a chandler's shop in the neighbourhood, for the ostensible purpose of spending a penny; and when the coast was quite clear, Polly fled: Jemima calling after her that if they could only go round towards the City Road on their way back, they would be sure to meet little Biler coming from school.

'Do you think that we might make time to go a little round in that direction, Susan?' inquired Polly, when they halted to take

breath.

'Why not, Mrs Richards?' returned Susan.

'It's getting on towards our dinner time you know,' said Polly.

But lunch had rendered her companion more than indifferent to this grave consideration, so she allowed no weight to it, and they resolved to go 'a little round.'

Now, it happened that poor Biler's life had been, since yesterday morning, rendered weary by the costume of the Charitable Grinders. The youth of the streets could not endure it. No young vagabond could be brought to bear its contemplation for a moment, without throwing himself upon the unoffending wearer, and doing him a mischief. His social existence had been more like that of an early Christian, than an innocent child of the nineteenth century. He had been stoned in the streets. He had been overthrown into gutters; bespattered with mud; violently flattened against posts. Entire strangers to his person had lifted his yellow cap off his head, and cast it to the winds. His legs had not only undergone verbal criticisms and revilings, but had been handled and pinched. That very morning, he had received a perfectly unsolicited black eye on his way to the Grinders' establishment, and had been punished for it by the master: a superannuated old Grinder of savage disposition, who had been appointed schoolmaster because he didn't know anything, and wasn't fit for anything, and for whose cruel cane all chubby little boys had a perfect fascination.

Thus it fell out that Biler, on his way home, sought

unfrequented paths; and slunk along by narrow passages and back streets, to avoid his tormentors. Being compelled to emerge into the main road, his ill fortune brought him at last where a small party of boys, headed by a ferocious young butcher, were lying in wait for any means of pleasurable excitement that might happen. These, finding a Charitable Grinder in the midst of them – unaccountably delivered over, as it were, into their hands – set up a general yell and rushed upon him.

But it so fell out likewise, that, at the same time, Polly, looking hopelessly along the road before her, after a good hour's walk, had said it was no use going any further, when suddenly she saw this sight. She no sooner saw it than, uttering a hasty exclamation, and giving Master Dombey to the black-eyed, she started to the rescue of her unhappy little son.

Surprises, like misfortunes, rarely come alone. The astonished Susan Nipper and her two young charges were rescued by the bystanders from under the very wheels of a passing carriage before they knew what had happened; and at that moment (it was market day) a thundering alarm of 'Mad Bull!' was raised.

With a wild confusion before her, of people running up and down, and shouting, and wheels running over them, and boys fighting, and mad bulls coming up, and the nurse in the midst of all these dangers being torn to pieces, Florence screamed and ran. She ran till she was exhausted, urging Susan to do the same; and then, stopping and wringing her hands as she remembered they had left the other nurse behind, found, with a sensation of

terror not to be described, that she was quite alone.

'Susan! Susan!' cried Florence, clapping her hands in the very ecstasy of her alarm. 'Oh, where are they? where are they?'

'Where are they?' said an old woman, coming hobbling across as fast as she could from the opposite side of the way. 'Why did you run away from 'em?'

'I was frightened,' answered Florence. 'I didn't know what I did. I thought they were with me. Where are they?'

The old woman took her by the wrist, and said, 'I'll show you.'

She was a very ugly old woman, with red rims round her eyes, and a mouth that mumbled and chattered of itself when she was not speaking. She was miserably dressed, and carried some skins over her arm. She seemed to have followed Florence some little way at all events, for she had lost her breath; and this made her uglier still, as she stood trying to regain it: working her shrivelled yellow face and throat into all sorts of contortions.

Florence was afraid of her, and looked, hesitating, up the street, of which she had almost reached the bottom. It was a solitary place – more a back road than a street – and there was no one in it but her-self and the old woman.

'You needn't be frightened now,' said the old woman, still holding her tight. 'Come along with me.'

'I – I don't know you. What's your name?' asked Florence.

'Mrs Brown,' said the old woman. 'Good Mrs Brown.'

'Are they near here?' asked Florence, beginning to be led away.

‘Susan ain’t far off,’ said Good Mrs Brown; ‘and the others are close to her.’

‘Is anybody hurt?’ cried Florence.

‘Not a bit of it,’ said Good Mrs Brown.

The child shed tears of delight on hearing this, and accompanied the old woman willingly; though she could not help glancing at her face as they went along – particularly at that industrious mouth – and wondering whether Bad Mrs Brown, if there were such a person, was at all like her.

They had not gone far, but had gone by some very uncomfortable places, such as brick-fields and tile-yards, when the old woman turned down a dirty lane, where the mud lay in deep black ruts in the middle of the road. She stopped before a shabby little house, as closely shut up as a house that was full of cracks and crevices could be. Opening the door with a key she took out of her bonnet, she pushed the child before her into a back room, where there was a great heap of rags of different colours lying on the floor; a heap of bones, and a heap of sifted dust or cinders; but there was no furniture at all, and the walls and ceiling were quite black.

The child became so terrified the she was stricken speechless, and looked as though about to swoon.

‘Now don’t be a young mule,’ said Good Mrs Brown, reviving her with a shake. ‘I’m not a going to hurt you. Sit upon the rags.’

Florence obeyed her, holding out her folded hands, in mute supplication.

‘I’m not a going to keep you, even, above an hour,’ said Mrs Brown. ‘D’ye understand what I say?’

The child answered with great difficulty, ‘Yes.’

‘Then,’ said Good Mrs Brown, taking her own seat on the bones, ‘don’t vex me. If you don’t, I tell you I won’t hurt you. But if you do, I’ll kill you. I could have you killed at any time – even if you was in your own bed at home. Now let’s know who you are, and what you are, and all about it.’

The old woman’s threats and promises; the dread of giving her offence; and the habit, unusual to a child, but almost natural to Florence now, of being quiet, and repressing what she felt, and feared, and hoped; enabled her to do this bidding, and to tell her little history, or what she knew of it. Mrs Brown listened attentively, until she had finished.

‘So your name’s Dombey, eh?’ said Mrs Brown.

‘I want that pretty frock, Miss Dombey,’ said Good Mrs Brown, ‘and that little bonnet, and a petticoat or two, and anything else you can spare. Come! Take ‘em off.’

Florence obeyed, as fast as her trembling hands would allow; keeping, all the while, a frightened eye on Mrs Brown. When she had divested herself of all the articles of apparel mentioned by that lady, Mrs B. examined them at leisure, and seemed tolerably well satisfied with their quality and value.

‘Humph!’ she said, running her eyes over the child’s slight figure, ‘I don’t see anything else – except the shoes. I must have the shoes, Miss Dombey.’

Poor little Florence took them off with equal alacrity, only too glad to have any more means of conciliation about her. The old woman then produced some wretched substitutes from the bottom of the heap of rags, which she turned up for that purpose; together with a girl's cloak, quite worn out and very old; and the crushed remains of a bonnet that had probably been picked up from some ditch or dunghill. In this dainty raiment, she instructed Florence to dress herself; and as such preparation seemed a prelude to her release, the child complied with increased readiness, if possible.

In hurriedly putting on the bonnet, if that may be called a bonnet which was more like a pad to carry loads on, she caught it in her hair which grew luxuriantly, and could not immediately disentangle it. Good Mrs Brown whipped out a large pair of scissors, and fell into an unaccountable state of excitement.

'Why couldn't you let me be!' said Mrs Brown, 'when I was contented? You little fool!'

'I beg your pardon. I don't know what I have done,' panted Florence. 'I couldn't help it.'

'Couldn't help it!' cried Mrs Brown. 'How do you expect I can help it? Why, Lord!' said the old woman, ruffling her curls with a furious pleasure, 'anybody but me would have had 'em off, first of all.'

Florence was so relieved to find that it was only her hair and not her head which Mrs Brown coveted, that she offered no resistance or entreaty, and merely raised her mild eyes towards

the face of that good soul.

'If I hadn't once had a gal of my own – beyond seas now – that was proud of her hair,' said Mrs Brown, 'I'd have had every lock of it. She's far away, she's far away! Oho! Oho!'

Mrs Brown's was not a melodious cry, but, accompanied with a wild tossing up of her lean arms, it was full of passionate grief, and thrilled to the heart of Florence, whom it frightened more than ever. It had its part, perhaps, in saving her curls; for Mrs Brown, after hovering about her with the scissors for some moments, like a new kind of butterfly, bade her hide them under the bonnet and let no trace of them escape to tempt her. Having accomplished this victory over herself, Mrs Brown resumed her seat on the bones, and smoked a very short black pipe, mowing and mumbling all the time, as if she were eating the stem.

When the pipe was smoked out, she gave the child a rabbit-skin to carry, that she might appear the more like her ordinary companion, and told her that she was now going to lead her to a public street whence she could inquire her way to her friends. But she cautioned her, with threats of summary and deadly vengeance in case of disobedience, not to talk to strangers, nor to repair to her own home (which may have been too near for Mrs Brown's convenience), but to her father's office in the City; also to wait at the street corner where she would be left, until the clock struck three. These directions Mrs Brown enforced with assurances that there would be potent eyes and ears in her employment cognizant of all she did; and these directions

Florence promised faithfully and earnestly to observe.

At length, Mrs Brown, issuing forth, conducted her changed and ragged little friend through a labyrinth of narrow streets and lanes and alleys, which emerged, after a long time, upon a stable yard, with a gateway at the end, whence the roar of a great thoroughfare made itself audible. Pointing out this gateway, and informing Florence that when the clocks struck three she was to go to the left, Mrs Brown, after making a parting grasp at her hair which seemed involuntary and quite beyond her own control, told her she knew what to do, and bade her go and do it: remembering that she was watched.

With a lighter heart, but still sore afraid, Florence felt herself released, and tripped off to the corner. When she reached it, she looked back and saw the head of Good Mrs Brown peeping out of the low wooden passage, where she had issued her parting injunctions; likewise the fist of Good Mrs Brown shaking towards her. But though she often looked back afterwards – every minute, at least, in her nervous recollection of the old woman – she could not see her again.

Florence remained there, looking at the bustle in the street, and more and more bewildered by it; and in the meanwhile the clocks appeared to have made up their minds never to strike three any more. At last the steeples rang out three o'clock; there was one close by, so she couldn't be mistaken; and – after often looking over her shoulder, and often going a little way, and as often coming back again, lest the all-powerful spies of Mrs

Brown should take offence – she hurried off, as fast as she could in her slipshod shoes, holding the rabbit-skin tight in her hand.

All she knew of her father's offices was that they belonged to Dombey and Son, and that that was a great power belonging to the City. So she could only ask the way to Dombey and Son's in the City; and as she generally made inquiry of children – being afraid to ask grown people – she got very little satisfaction indeed. But by dint of asking her way to the City after a while, and dropping the rest of her inquiry for the present, she really did advance, by slow degrees, towards the heart of that great region which is governed by the terrible Lord Mayor.

Tired of walking, repulsed and pushed about, stunned by the noise and confusion, anxious for her brother and the nurses, terrified by what she had undergone, and the prospect of encountering her angry father in such an altered state; perplexed and frightened alike by what had passed, and what was passing, and what was yet before her; Florence went upon her weary way with tearful eyes, and once or twice could not help stopping to ease her bursting heart by crying bitterly. But few people noticed her at those times, in the garb she wore: or if they did, believed that she was tutored to excite compassion, and passed on. Florence, too, called to her aid all the firmness and self-reliance of a character that her sad experience had prematurely formed and tried: and keeping the end she had in view steadily before her, steadily pursued it.

It was full two hours later in the afternoon than when she had

started on this strange adventure, when, escaping from the clash and clangour of a narrow street full of carts and waggons, she peeped into a kind of wharf or landing-place upon the riverside, where there were a great many packages, casks, and boxes, strewn about; a large pair of wooden scales; and a little wooden house on wheels, outside of which, looking at the neighbouring masts and boats, a stout man stood whistling, with his pen behind his ear, and his hands in his pockets, as if his day's work were nearly done.

'Now then!' said this man, happening to turn round. 'We haven't got anything for you, little girl. Be off!'

'If you please, is this the City?' asked the trembling daughter of the Dombeys.

'Ah! It's the City. You know that well enough, I daresay. Be off! We haven't got anything for you.'

'I don't want anything, thank you,' was the timid answer. 'Except to know the way to Dombey and Son's.'

The man who had been strolling carelessly towards her, seemed surprised by this reply, and looking attentively in her face, rejoined:

'Why, what can you want with Dombey and Son's?'

'To know the way there, if you please.'

The man looked at her yet more curiously, and rubbed the back of his head so hard in his wonderment that he knocked his own hat off.

'Joe!' he called to another man – a labourer – as he picked it

up and put it on again.

'Joe it is!' said Joe.

'Where's that young spark of Dombey's who's been watching the shipment of them goods?'

'Just gone, by t'other gate,' said Joe.

'Call him back a minute.'

Joe ran up an archway, bawling as he went, and very soon returned with a blithe-looking boy.

'You're Dombey's jockey, ain't you?' said the first man.

'I'm in Dombey's House, Mr Clark,' returned the boy.

'Look'ye here, then,' said Mr Clark.

Obedient to the indication of Mr Clark's hand, the boy approached towards Florence, wondering, as well he might, what he had to do with her. But she, who had heard what passed, and who, besides the relief of so suddenly considering herself safe at her journey's end, felt reassured beyond all measure by his lively youthful face and manner, ran eagerly up to him, leaving one of the slipshod shoes upon the ground and caught his hand in both of hers.

'I am lost, if you please!' said Florence.

'Lost!' cried the boy.

'Yes, I was lost this morning, a long way from here – and I have had my clothes taken away, since – and I am not dressed in my own now – and my name is Florence Dombey, my little brother's only sister – and, oh dear, dear, take care of me, if you please!' sobbed Florence, giving full vent to the childish

feelings she had so long suppressed, and bursting into tears. At the same time her miserable bonnet falling off, her hair came tumbling down about her face: moving to speechless admiration and commiseration, young Walter, nephew of Solomon Gills, Ships' Instrument-maker in general.

Mr Clark stood rapt in amazement: observing under his breath, I never saw such a start on this wharf before. Walter picked up the shoe, and put it on the little foot as the Prince in the story might have fitted Cinderella's slipper on. He hung the rabbit-skin over his left arm; gave the right to Florence; and felt, not to say like Richard Whittington – that is a tame comparison – but like Saint George of England, with the dragon lying dead before him.

'Don't cry, Miss Dombey,' said Walter, in a transport of enthusiasm. 'What a wonderful thing for me that I am here! You are as safe now as if you were guarded by a whole boat's crew of picked men from a man-of-war. Oh, don't cry.'

'I won't cry any more,' said Florence. 'I am only crying for joy.'

'Crying for joy!' thought Walter, 'and I'm the cause of it! Come along, Miss Dombey. There's the other shoe off now! Take mine, Miss Dombey.'

'No, no, no,' said Florence, checking him in the act of impetuously pulling off his own. 'These do better. These do very well.'

'Why, to be sure,' said Walter, glancing at her foot, 'mine are a mile too large. What am I thinking about! You never could walk

in mine! Come along, Miss Dombey. Let me see the villain who will dare molest you now.'

So Walter, looking immensely fierce, led off Florence, looking very happy; and they went arm-in-arm along the streets, perfectly indifferent to any astonishment that their appearance might or did excite by the way.

It was growing dark and foggy, and beginning to rain too; but they cared nothing for this: being both wholly absorbed in the late adventures of Florence, which she related with the innocent good faith and confidence of her years, while Walter listened as if, far from the mud and grease of Thames Street, they were rambling alone among the broad leaves and tall trees of some desert island in the tropics – as he very likely fancied, for the time, they were.

'Have we far to go?' asked Florence at last, lilting up her eyes to her companion's face.

'Ah! By-the-bye,' said Walter, stopping, 'let me see; where are we? Oh! I know. But the offices are shut up now, Miss Dombey. There's nobody there. Mr Dombey has gone home long ago. I suppose we must go home too? or, stay. Suppose I take you to my Uncle's, where I live – it's very near here – and go to your house in a coach to tell them you are safe, and bring you back some clothes. Won't that be best?'

'I think so,' answered Florence. 'Don't you? What do you think?'

As they stood deliberating in the street, a man passed them, who glanced quickly at Walter as he went by, as if he recognised

him; but seeming to correct that first impression, he passed on without stopping.

'Why, I think it's Mr Carker,' said Walter. 'Carker in our House. Not Carker our Manager, Miss Dombey – the other Carker; the Junior – Halloa! Mr Carker!'

'Is that Walter Gay?' said the other, stopping and returning. 'I couldn't believe it, with such a strange companion.'

As he stood near a lamp, listening with surprise to Walter's hurried explanation, he presented a remarkable contrast to the two youthful figures arm-in-arm before him. He was not old, but his hair was white; his body was bent, or bowed as if by the weight of some great trouble: and there were deep lines in his worn and melancholy face. The fire of his eyes, the expression of his features, the very voice in which he spoke, were all subdued and quenched, as if the spirit within him lay in ashes. He was respectably, though very plainly dressed, in black; but his clothes, moulded to the general character of his figure, seemed to shrink and abase themselves upon him, and to join in the sorrowful solicitation which the whole man from head to foot expressed, to be left unnoticed, and alone in his humility.

And yet his interest in youth and hopefulness was not extinguished with the other embers of his soul, for he watched the boy's earnest countenance as he spoke with unusual sympathy, though with an inexplicable show of trouble and compassion, which escaped into his looks, however hard he strove to hold it prisoner. When Walter, in conclusion, put to him the question he

had put to Florence, he still stood glancing at him with the same expression, as if he had read some fate upon his face, mournfully at variance with its present brightness.

'What do you advise, Mr Carker?' said Walter, smiling. 'You always give me good advice, you know, when you do speak to me. That's not often, though.'

'I think your own idea is the best,' he answered: looking from Florence to Walter, and back again.

'Mr Carker,' said Walter, brightening with a generous thought, 'Come! Here's a chance for you. Go you to Mr Dombey's, and be the messenger of good news. It may do you some good, Sir. I'll remain at home. You shall go.'

'I!' returned the other.

'Yes. Why not, Mr Carker?' said the boy.

He merely shook him by the hand in answer; he seemed in a manner ashamed and afraid even to do that; and bidding him good-night, and advising him to make haste, turned away.

'Come, Miss Dombey,' said Walter, looking after him as they turned away also, 'we'll go to my Uncle's as quick as we can. Did you ever hear Mr Dombey speak of Mr Carker the Junior, Miss Florence?'

'No,' returned the child, mildly, 'I don't often hear Papa speak.'

'Ah! true! more shame for him,' thought Walter. After a minute's pause, during which he had been looking down upon the gentle patient little face moving on at his side, he said, 'The strangest man, Mr Carker the Junior is, Miss Florence, that ever

you heard of. If you could understand what an extraordinary interest he takes in me, and yet how he shuns me and avoids me; and what a low place he holds in our office, and how he is never advanced, and never complains, though year after year he sees young men passed over his head, and though his brother (younger than he is), is our head Manager, you would be as much puzzled about him as I am.'

As Florence could hardly be expected to understand much about it, Walter bestirred himself with his accustomed boyish animation and restlessness to change the subject; and one of the unfortunate shoes coming off again opportunely, proposed to carry Florence to his uncle's in his arms. Florence, though very tired, laughingly declined the proposal, lest he should let her fall; and as they were already near the wooden Midshipman, and as Walter went on to cite various precedents, from shipwrecks and other moving accidents, where younger boys than he had triumphantly rescued and carried off older girls than Florence, they were still in full conversation about it when they arrived at the Instrument-maker's door.

'Holloa, Uncle Sol!' cried Walter, bursting into the shop, and speaking incoherently and out of breath, from that time forth, for the rest of the evening. 'Here's a wonderful adventure! Here's Mr Dombey's daughter lost in the streets, and robbed of her clothes by an old witch of a woman – found by me – brought home to our parlour to rest – look here!'

'Good Heaven!' said Uncle Sol, starting back against his

favourite compass-case. 'It can't be! Well, I – '

'No, nor anybody else,' said Walter, anticipating the rest. 'Nobody would, nobody could, you know. Here! just help me lift the little sofa near the fire, will you, Uncle Sol – take care of the plates – cut some dinner for her, will you, Uncle – throw those shoes under the grate. Miss Florence – put your feet on the fender to dry – how damp they are – here's an adventure, Uncle, eh? – God bless my soul, how hot I am!'

Solomon Gills was quite as hot, by sympathy, and in excessive bewilderment. He patted Florence's head, pressed her to eat, pressed her to drink, rubbed the soles of her feet with his pocket-handkerchief heated at the fire, followed his locomotive nephew with his eyes, and ears, and had no clear perception of anything except that he was being constantly knocked against and tumbled over by that excited young gentleman, as he darted about the room attempting to accomplish twenty things at once, and doing nothing at all.

'Here, wait a minute, Uncle,' he continued, catching up a candle, 'till I run upstairs, and get another jacket on, and then I'll be off. I say, Uncle, isn't this an adventure?'

'My dear boy,' said Solomon, who, with his spectacles on his forehead and the great chronometer in his pocket, was incessantly oscillating between Florence on the sofa, and his nephew in all parts of the parlour, 'it's the most extraordinary – '

'No, but do, Uncle, please – do, Miss Florence – dinner, you know, Uncle.'

‘Yes, yes, yes,’ cried Solomon, cutting instantly into a leg of mutton, as if he were catering for a giant. ‘I’ll take care of her, Wally! I understand. Pretty dear! Famished, of course. You go and get ready. Lord bless me! Sir Richard Whittington thrice Lord Mayor of London.’

Walter was not very long in mounting to his lofty garret and descending from it, but in the meantime Florence, overcome by fatigue, had sunk into a doze before the fire. The short interval of quiet, though only a few minutes in duration, enabled Solomon Gills so far to collect his wits as to make some little arrangements for her comfort, and to darken the room, and to screen her from the blaze. Thus, when the boy returned, she was sleeping peacefully.

‘That’s capital!’ he whispered, giving Solomon such a hug that it squeezed a new expression into his face. ‘Now I’m off. I’ll just take a crust of bread with me, for I’m very hungry – and don’t wake her, Uncle Sol.’

‘No, no,’ said Solomon. ‘Pretty child.’

‘Pretty, indeed!’ cried Walter. ‘I never saw such a face, Uncle Sol. Now I’m off.’

‘That’s right,’ said Solomon, greatly relieved.

‘I say, Uncle Sol,’ cried Walter, putting his face in at the door.

‘Here he is again,’ said Solomon.

‘How does she look now?’

‘Quite happy,’ said Solomon.

‘That’s famous! now I’m off.’

‘I hope you are,’ said Solomon to himself.

‘I say, Uncle Sol,’ cried Walter, reappearing at the door.

‘Here he is again!’ said Solomon.

‘We met Mr Carker the Junior in the street, queerer than ever. He bade me good-bye, but came behind us here – there’s an odd thing! – for when we reached the shop door, I looked round, and saw him going quietly away, like a servant who had seen me home, or a faithful dog. How does she look now, Uncle?’

‘Pretty much the same as before, Wally,’ replied Uncle Sol.

‘That’s right. Now I am off!’

And this time he really was: and Solomon Gills, with no appetite for dinner, sat on the opposite side of the fire, watching Florence in her slumber, building a great many airy castles of the most fantastic architecture; and looking, in the dim shade, and in the close vicinity of all the instruments, like a magician disguised in a Welsh wig and a suit of coffee colour, who held the child in an enchanted sleep.

In the meantime, Walter proceeded towards Mr Dombey’s house at a pace seldom achieved by a hack horse from the stand; and yet with his head out of window every two or three minutes, in impatient remonstrance with the driver. Arriving at his journey’s end, he leaped out, and breathlessly announcing his errand to the servant, followed him straight into the library, we there was a great confusion of tongues, and where Mr Dombey, his sister, and Miss Tox, Richards, and Nipper, were all congregated together.

‘Oh! I beg your pardon, Sir,’ said Walter, rushing up to him, ‘but I’m happy to say it’s all right, Sir. Miss Dombey’s found!’

The boy with his open face, and flowing hair, and sparkling eyes, panting with pleasure and excitement, was wonderfully opposed to Mr Dombey, as he sat confronting him in his library chair.

‘I told you, Louisa, that she would certainly be found,’ said Mr Dombey, looking slightly over his shoulder at that lady, who wept in company with Miss Tox. ‘Let the servants know that no further steps are necessary. This boy who brings the information, is young Gay, from the office. How was my daughter found, Sir? I know how she was lost.’ Here he looked majestically at Richards. ‘But how was she found? Who found her?’

‘Why, I believe I found Miss Dombey, Sir,’ said Walter modestly, ‘at least I don’t know that I can claim the merit of having exactly found her, Sir, but I was the fortunate instrument of – ’

‘What do you mean, Sir,’ interrupted Mr Dombey, regarding the boy’s evident pride and pleasure in his share of the transaction with an instinctive dislike, ‘by not having exactly found my daughter, and by being a fortunate instrument? Be plain and coherent, if you please.’

It was quite out of Walter’s power to be coherent; but he rendered himself as explanatory as he could, in his breathless state, and stated why he had come alone.

‘You hear this, girl?’ said Mr Dombey sternly to the black-

eyed. ‘Take what is necessary, and return immediately with this young man to fetch Miss Florence home. Gay, you will be rewarded to-morrow.’

‘Oh! thank you, Sir,’ said Walter. ‘You are very kind. I’m sure I was not thinking of any reward, Sir.’

‘You are a boy,’ said Mr Dombey, suddenly and almost fiercely; ‘and what you think of, or affect to think of, is of little consequence. You have done well, Sir. Don’t undo it. Louisa, please to give the lad some wine.’

Mr Dombey’s glance followed Walter Gay with sharp disfavour, as he left the room under the pilotage of Mrs Chick; and it may be that his mind’s eye followed him with no greater relish, as he rode back to his Uncle’s with Miss Susan Nipper.

There they found that Florence, much refreshed by sleep, had dined, and greatly improved the acquaintance of Solomon Gills, with whom she was on terms of perfect confidence and ease. The black-eyed (who had cried so much that she might now be called the red-eyed, and who was very silent and depressed) caught her in her arms without a word of contradiction or reproach, and made a very hysterical meeting of it. Then converting the parlour, for the nonce, into a private tiring room, she dressed her, with great care, in proper clothes; and presently led her forth, as like a Dombey as her natural disqualifications admitted of her being made.

‘Good-night!’ said Florence, running up to Solomon. ‘You have been very good to me.’

Old Sol was quite delighted, and kissed her like her grandfather.

'Good-night, Walter! Good-bye!' said Florence.

'Good-bye!' said Walter, giving both his hands.

'I'll never forget you,' pursued Florence. 'No! indeed I never will. Good-bye, Walter!'

In the innocence of her grateful heart, the child lifted up her face to his. Walter, bending down his own, raised it again, all red and burning; and looked at Uncle Sol, quite sheepishly.

'Where's Walter?' 'Good-night, Walter!' 'Good-bye, Walter!' 'Shake hands once more, Walter!' This was still Florence's cry, after she was shut up with her little maid, in the coach. And when the coach at length moved off, Walter on the door-step gaily returned the waving of her handkerchief, while the wooden Midshipman behind him seemed, like himself, intent upon that coach alone, excluding all the other passing coaches from his observation.

In good time Mr Dombey's mansion was gained again, and again there was a noise of tongues in the library. Again, too, the coach was ordered to wait – 'for Mrs Richards,' one of Susan's fellow-servants ominously whispered, as she passed with Florence.

The entrance of the lost child made a slight sensation, but not much. Mr Dombey, who had never found her, kissed her once upon the forehead, and cautioned her not to run away again, or wander anywhere with treacherous attendants. Mrs

Chick stopped in her lamentations on the corruption of human nature, even when beckoned to the paths of virtue by a Charitable Grinder; and received her with a welcome something short of the reception due to none but perfect Dombeys. Miss Tox regulated her feelings by the models before her. Richards, the culprit Richards, alone poured out her heart in broken words of welcome, and bowed herself over the little wandering head as if she really loved it.

'Ah, Richards!' said Mrs Chick, with a sigh. 'It would have been much more satisfactory to those who wish to think well of their fellow creatures, and much more becoming in you, if you had shown some proper feeling, in time, for the little child that is now going to be prematurely deprived of its natural nourishment.

'Cut off,' said Miss Tox, in a plaintive whisper, 'from one common fountain!'

'If it was my ungrateful case,' said Mrs Chick, solemnly, 'and I had your reflections, Richards, I should feel as if the Charitable Grinders' dress would blight my child, and the education choke him.'

For the matter of that – but Mrs Chick didn't know it – he had been pretty well blighted by the dress already; and as to the education, even its retributive effect might be produced in time, for it was a storm of sobs and blows.

'Louisa!' said Mr Dombey. 'It is not necessary to prolong these observations. The woman is discharged and paid. You leave this house, Richards, for taking my son – my son,' said Mr Dombey,

emphatically repeating these two words, 'into haunts and into society which are not to be thought of without a shudder. As to the accident which befel Miss Florence this morning, I regard that as, in one great sense, a happy and fortunate circumstance; inasmuch as, but for that occurrence, I never could have known – and from your own lips too – of what you had been guilty. I think, Louisa, the other nurse, the young person,' here Miss Nipper sobbed aloud, 'being so much younger, and necessarily influenced by Paul's nurse, may remain. Have the goodness to direct that this woman's coach is paid to' – Mr Dombey stopped and winced – 'to Staggs's Gardens.'

Polly moved towards the door, with Florence holding to her dress, and crying to her in the most pathetic manner not to go away. It was a dagger in the haughty father's heart, an arrow in his brain, to see how the flesh and blood he could not disown clung to this obscure stranger, and he sitting by. Not that he cared to whom his daughter turned, or from whom turned away. The swift sharp agony struck through him, as he thought of what his son might do.

His son cried lustily that night, at all events. Sooth to say, poor Paul had better reason for his tears than sons of that age often have, for he had lost his second mother – his first, so far as he knew – by a stroke as sudden as that natural affliction which had darkened the beginning of his life. At the same blow, his sister too, who cried herself to sleep so mournfully, had lost as good and true a friend. But that is quite beside the question. Let us

waste no words about it.

CHAPTER 7. A Bird's-eye Glimpse of Miss Tox's Dwelling-place: also of the State of Miss Tox's Affections

Miss Tox inhabited a dark little house that had been squeezed, at some remote period of English History, into a fashionable neighbourhood at the west end of the town, where it stood in the shade like a poor relation of the great street round the corner, coldly looked down upon by mighty mansions. It was not exactly in a court, and it was not exactly in a yard; but it was in the dullest of No-Thoroughfares, rendered anxious and haggard by distant double knocks. The name of this retirement, where grass grew between the chinks in the stone pavement, was Princess's Place; and in Princess's Place was Princess's Chapel, with a tinkling bell, where sometimes as many as five-and-twenty people attended service on a Sunday. The Princess's Arms was also there, and much resorted to by splendid footmen. A sedan chair was kept inside the railing before the Princess's Arms, but it had never come out within the memory of man; and on fine mornings, the top of every rail (there were eight-and-forty, as Miss Tox had often counted) was decorated with a pewter-pot.

There was another private house besides Miss Tox's in Princess's Place: not to mention an immense Pair of gates, with an immense pair of lion-headed knockers on them, which were

never opened by any chance, and were supposed to constitute a disused entrance to somebody's stables. Indeed, there was a smack of stabling in the air of Princess's Place; and Miss Tox's bedroom (which was at the back) commanded a vista of Mews, where hostlers, at whatever sort of work engaged, were continually accompanying themselves with effervescent noises; and where the most domestic and confidential garments of coachmen and their wives and families, usually hung, like Macbeth's banners, on the outward walls.

At this other private house in Princess's Place, tenanted by a retired butler who had married a housekeeper, apartments were let Furnished, to a single gentleman: to wit, a wooden-featured, blue-faced Major, with his eyes starting out of his head, in whom Miss Tox recognised, as she herself expressed it, 'something so truly military;' and between whom and herself, an occasional interchange of newspapers and pamphlets, and such Platonic dalliance, was effected through the medium of a dark servant of the Major's who Miss Tox was quite content to classify as a 'native,' without connecting him with any geographical idea whatever.

Perhaps there never was a smaller entry and staircase, than the entry and staircase of Miss Tox's house. Perhaps, taken altogether, from top to bottom, it was the most inconvenient little house in England, and the crookedest; but then, Miss Tox said, what a situation! There was very little daylight to be got there in the winter: no sun at the best of times: air was out of the

question, and traffic was walled out. Still Miss Tox said, think of the situation! So said the blue-faced Major, whose eyes were starting out of his head: who gloried in Princess's Place: and who delighted to turn the conversation at his club, whenever he could, to something connected with some of the great people in the great street round the corner, that he might have the satisfaction of saying they were his neighbours.

In short, with Miss Tox and the blue-faced Major, it was enough for Princess's Place – as with a very small fragment of society, it is enough for many a little hanger-on of another sort – to be well connected, and to have genteel blood in its veins. It might be poor, mean, shabby, stupid, dull. No matter. The great street round the corner trailed off into Princess's Place; and that which of High Holborn would have become a choleric word, spoken of Princess's Place became flat blasphemy.

The dingy tenement inhabited by Miss Tox was her own; having been devised and bequeathed to her by the deceased owner of the fishy eye in the locket, of whom a miniature portrait, with a powdered head and a pigtail, balanced the kettle-holder on opposite sides of the parlour fireplace. The greater part of the furniture was of the powdered-head and pig-tail period: comprising a plate-warmer, always languishing and sprawling its four attenuated bow legs in somebody's way; and an obsolete harpsichord, illuminated round the maker's name with a painted garland of sweet peas. In any part of the house, visitors were usually cognizant of a prevailing mustiness; and in warm weather

Miss Tox had been seen apparently writing in sundry chinks and crevices of the wainscoat with the the wrong end of a pen dipped in spirits of turpentine.

Although Major Bagstock had arrived at what is called in polite literature, the grand meridian of life, and was proceeding on his journey downhill with hardly any throat, and a very rigid pair of jaw-bones, and long-flapped elephantine ears, and his eyes and complexion in the state of artificial excitement already mentioned, he was mightily proud of awakening an interest in Miss Tox, and tickled his vanity with the fiction that she was a splendid woman who had her eye on him. This he had several times hinted at the club: in connexion with little jocularities, of which old Joe Bagstock, old Joey Bagstock, old J. Bagstock, old Josh Bagstock, or so forth, was the perpetual theme: it being, as it were, the Major's stronghold and donjon-keep of light humour, to be on the most familiar terms with his own name.

'Joey B., Sir,' the Major would say, with a flourish of his walking-stick, 'is worth a dozen of you. If you had a few more of the Bagstock breed among you, Sir, you'd be none the worse for it. Old Joe, Sir, needn't look far for a wife even now, if he was on the look-out; but he's hard-hearted, Sir, is Joe – he's tough, Sir, tough, and de-vilish sly!' After such a declaration, wheezing sounds would be heard; and the Major's blue would deepen into purple, while his eyes strained and started convulsively.

Notwithstanding his very liberal laudation of himself, however, the Major was selfish. It may be doubted whether there

ever was a more entirely selfish person at heart; or at stomach is perhaps a better expression, seeing that he was more decidedly endowed with that latter organ than with the former. He had no idea of being overlooked or slighted by anybody; least of all, had he the remotest comprehension of being overlooked and slighted by Miss Tox.

And yet, Miss Tox, as it appeared, forgot him – gradually forgot him. She began to forget him soon after her discovery of the Toodle family. She continued to forget him up to the time of the christening. She went on forgetting him with compound interest after that. Something or somebody had superseded him as a source of interest.

'Good morning, Ma'am,' said the Major, meeting Miss Tox in Princess's Place, some weeks after the changes chronicled in the last chapter.

'Good morning, Sir,' said Miss Tox; very coldly.

'Joe Bagstock, Ma'am,' observed the Major, with his usual gallantry, 'has not had the happiness of bowing to you at your window, for a considerable period. Joe has been hardly used, Ma'am. His sun has been behind a cloud.'

Miss Tox inclined her head; but very coldly indeed.

'Joe's luminary has been out of town, Ma'am, perhaps,' inquired the Major.

'I? out of town? oh no, I have not been out of town,' said Miss Tox. 'I have been much engaged lately. My time is nearly all devoted to some very intimate friends. I am afraid I have none

to spare, even now. Good morning, Sir!'

As Miss Tox, with her most fascinating step and carriage, disappeared from Princess's Place, the Major stood looking after her with a bluer face than ever: muttering and growling some not at all complimentary remarks.

'Why, damme, Sir,' said the Major, rolling his lobster eyes round and round Princess's Place, and apostrophizing its fragrant air, 'six months ago, the woman loved the ground Josh Bagstock walked on. What's the meaning of it?'

The Major decided, after some consideration, that it meant mantraps; that it meant plotting and snaring; that Miss Tox was digging pitfalls. 'But you won't catch Joe, Ma'am,' said the Major. 'He's tough, Ma'am, tough, is J.B. Tough, and de-vilish sly!' over which reflection he chuckled for the rest of the day.

But still, when that day and many other days were gone and past, it seemed that Miss Tox took no heed whatever of the Major, and thought nothing at all about him. She had been wont, once upon a time, to look out at one of her little dark windows by accident, and blushingly return the Major's greeting; but now, she never gave the Major a chance, and cared nothing at all whether he looked over the way or not. Other changes had come to pass too. The Major, standing in the shade of his own apartment, could make out that an air of greater smartness had recently come over Miss Tox's house; that a new cage with gilded wires had been provided for the ancient little canary bird; that divers ornaments, cut out of coloured card-boards and paper, seemed

to decorate the chimney-piece and tables; that a plant or two had suddenly sprung up in the windows; that Miss Tox occasionally practised on the harpsichord, whose garland of sweet peas was always displayed ostentatiously, crowned with the Copenhagen and Bird Waltzes in a Music Book of Miss Tox's own copying.

Over and above all this, Miss Tox had long been dressed with uncommon care and elegance in slight mourning. But this helped the Major out of his difficulty; and he determined within himself that she had come into a small legacy, and grown proud.

It was on the very next day after he had eased his mind by arriving at this decision, that the Major, sitting at his breakfast, saw an apparition so tremendous and wonderful in Miss Tox's little drawing-room, that he remained for some time rooted to his chair; then, rushing into the next room, returned with a double-barrelled opera-glass, through which he surveyed it intently for some minutes.

'It's a Baby, Sir,' said the Major, shutting up the glass again, 'for fifty thousand pounds!'

The Major couldn't forget it. He could do nothing but whistle, and stare to that extent, that his eyes, compared with what they now became, had been in former times quite cavernous and sunken. Day after day, two, three, four times a week, this Baby reappeared. The Major continued to stare and whistle. To all other intents and purposes he was alone in Princess's Place. Miss Tox had ceased to mind what he did. He might have been black as well as blue, and it would have been of no consequence to her.

The perseverance with which she walked out of Princess's Place to fetch this baby and its nurse, and walked back with them, and walked home with them again, and continually mounted guard over them; and the perseverance with which she nursed it herself, and fed it, and played with it, and froze its young blood with airs upon the harpsichord, was extraordinary. At about this same period too, she was seized with a passion for looking at a certain bracelet; also with a passion for looking at the moon, of which she would take long observations from her chamber window. But whatever she looked at; sun, moon, stars, or bracelet; she looked no more at the Major. And the Major whistled, and stared, and wondered, and dodged about his room, and could make nothing of it.

'You'll quite win my brother Paul's heart, and that's the truth, my dear,' said Mrs Chick, one day.

Miss Tox turned pale.

'He grows more like Paul every day,' said Mrs Chick.

Miss Tox returned no other reply than by taking the little Paul in her arms, and making his cockade perfectly flat and limp with her caresses.

'His mother, my dear,' said Miss Tox, 'whose acquaintance I was to have made through you, does he at all resemble her?'

'Not at all,' returned Louisa

'She was – she was pretty, I believe?' faltered Miss Tox.

'Why, poor dear Fanny was interesting,' said Mrs Chick, after some judicial consideration. 'Certainly interesting. She had not

that air of commanding superiority which one would somehow expect, almost as a matter of course, to find in my brother's wife; nor had she that strength and vigour of mind which such a man requires.'

Miss Tox heaved a deep sigh.

'But she was pleasing:' said Mrs Chick: 'extremely so. And she meant! – oh, dear, how well poor Fanny meant!'

'You Angel!' cried Miss Tox to little Paul. 'You Picture of your own Papa!'

If the Major could have known how many hopes and ventures, what a multitude of plans and speculations, rested on that baby head; and could have seen them hovering, in all their heterogeneous confusion and disorder, round the puckered cap of the unconscious little Paul; he might have stared indeed. Then would he have recognised, among the crowd, some few ambitious motes and beams belonging to Miss Tox; then would he perhaps have understood the nature of that lady's faltering investment in the Dombey Firm.

If the child himself could have awakened in the night, and seen, gathered about his cradle-curtains, faint reflections of the dreams that other people had of him, they might have scared him, with good reason. But he slumbered on, alike unconscious of the kind intentions of Miss Tox, the wonder of the Major, the early sorrows of his sister, and the stern visions of his father; and innocent that any spot of earth contained a Dombey or a Son.

CHAPTER 8. Paul's Further Progress, Growth and Character

Beneath the watching and attentive eyes of Time – so far another Major – Paul's slumbers gradually changed. More and more light broke in upon them; distincter and distincter dreams disturbed them; an accumulating crowd of objects and impressions swarmed about his rest; and so he passed from babyhood to childhood, and became a talking, walking, wondering Dombey.

On the downfall and banishment of Richards, the nursery may be said to have been put into commission: as a Public Department is sometimes, when no individual Atlas can be found to support it The Commissioners were, of course, Mrs Chick and Miss Tox: who devoted themselves to their duties with such astonishing ardour that Major Bagstock had every day some new reminder of his being forsaken, while Mr Chick, bereft of domestic supervision, cast himself upon the gay world, dined at clubs and coffee-houses, smelt of smoke on three different occasions, went to the play by himself, and in short, loosened (as Mrs Chick once told him) every social bond, and moral obligation.

Yet, in spite of his early promise, all this vigilance and care could not make little Paul a thriving boy. Naturally delicate,

perhaps, he pined and wasted after the dismissal of his nurse, and, for a long time, seemed but to wait his opportunity of gliding through their hands, and seeking his lost mother. This dangerous ground in his steeple-chase towards manhood passed, he still found it very rough riding, and was grievously beset by all the obstacles in his course. Every tooth was a break-neck fence, and every pimple in the measles a stone wall to him. He was down in every fit of the hooping-cough, and rolled upon and crushed by a whole field of small diseases, that came trooping on each other's heels to prevent his getting up again. Some bird of prey got into his throat instead of the thrush; and the very chickens turning ferocious – if they have anything to do with that infant malady to which they lend their name – worried him like tiger-cats.

The chill of Paul's christening had struck home, perhaps to some sensitive part of his nature, which could not recover itself in the cold shade of his father; but he was an unfortunate child from that day. Mrs Wickam often said she never see a dear so put upon.

Mrs Wickam was a waiter's wife – which would seem equivalent to being any other man's widow – whose application for an engagement in Mr Dombey's service had been favourably considered, on account of the apparent impossibility of her having any followers, or anyone to follow; and who, from within a day or two of Paul's sharp weaning, had been engaged as his nurse. Mrs Wickam was a meek woman, of a fair complexion, with her eyebrows always elevated, and her head

always drooping; who was always ready to pity herself, or to be pitied, or to pity anybody else; and who had a surprising natural gift of viewing all subjects in an utterly forlorn and pitiable light, and bringing dreadful precedents to bear upon them, and deriving the greatest consolation from the exercise of that talent.

It is hardly necessary to observe, that no touch of this quality ever reached the magnificent knowledge of Mr Dombey. It would have been remarkable, indeed, if any had; when no one in the house – not even Mrs Chick or Miss Tox – dared ever whisper to him that there had, on any one occasion, been the least reason for uneasiness in reference to little Paul. He had settled, within himself, that the child must necessarily pass through a certain routine of minor maladies, and that the sooner he did so the better. If he could have bought him off, or provided a substitute, as in the case of an unlucky drawing for the militia, he would have been glad to do so, on liberal terms. But as this was not feasible, he merely wondered, in his haughty manner, now and then, what Nature meant by it; and comforted himself with the reflection that there was another milestone passed upon the road, and that the great end of the journey lay so much the nearer. For the feeling uppermost in his mind, now and constantly intensifying, and increasing in it as Paul grew older, was impatience. Impatience for the time to come, when his visions of their united consequence and grandeur would be triumphantly realized.

Some philosophers tell us that selfishness is at the root of our

best loves and affections. Mr Dombey's young child was, from the beginning, so distinctly important to him as a part of his own greatness, or (which is the same thing) of the greatness of Dombey and Son, that there is no doubt his parental affection might have been easily traced, like many a goodly superstructure of fair fame, to a very low foundation. But he loved his son with all the love he had. If there were a warm place in his frosty heart, his son occupied it; if its very hard surface could receive the impression of any image, the image of that son was there; though not so much as an infant, or as a boy, but as a grown man – the 'Son' of the Firm. Therefore he was impatient to advance into the future, and to hurry over the intervening passages of his history. Therefore he had little or no anxiety about them, in spite of his love; feeling as if the boy had a charmed life, and must become the man with whom he held such constant communication in his thoughts, and for whom he planned and projected, as for an existing reality, every day.

Thus Paul grew to be nearly five years old. He was a pretty little fellow; though there was something wan and wistful in his small face, that gave occasion to many significant shakes of Mrs Wickam's head, and many long-drawn inspirations of Mrs Wickam's breath. His temper gave abundant promise of being imperious in after-life; and he had as hopeful an apprehension of his own importance, and the rightful subservience of all other things and persons to it, as heart could desire. He was childish and sportive enough at times, and not of a sullen disposition;

but he had a strange, old-fashioned, thoughtful way, at other times, of sitting brooding in his miniature arm-chair, when he looked (and talked) like one of those terrible little Beings in the Fairy tales, who, at a hundred and fifty or two hundred years of age, fantastically represent the children for whom they have been substituted. He would frequently be stricken with this precocious mood upstairs in the nursery; and would sometimes lapse into it suddenly, exclaiming that he was tired: even while playing with Florence, or driving Miss Tox in single harness. But at no time did he fall into it so surely, as when, his little chair being carried down into his father's room, he sat there with him after dinner, by the fire. They were the strangest pair at such a time that ever firelight shone upon. Mr Dombey so erect and solemn, gazing at the glare; his little image, with an old, old face, peering into the red perspective with the fixed and rapt attention of a sage. Mr Dombey entertaining complicated worldly schemes and plans; the little image entertaining Heaven knows what wild fancies, half-formed thoughts, and wandering speculations. Mr Dombey stiff with starch and arrogance; the little image by inheritance, and in unconscious imitation. The two so very much alike, and yet so monstrously contrasted.

On one of these occasions, when they had both been perfectly quiet for a long time, and Mr Dombey only knew that the child was awake by occasionally glancing at his eye, where the bright fire was sparkling like a jewel, little Paul broke silence thus:

'Papa! what's money?'

The abrupt question had such immediate reference to the subject of Mr Dombey's thoughts, that Mr Dombey was quite disconcerted.

'What is money, Paul?' he answered. 'Money?'

'Yes,' said the child, laying his hands upon the elbows of his little chair, and turning the old face up towards Mr Dombey's; 'what is money?'

Mr Dombey was in a difficulty. He would have liked to give him some explanation involving the terms circulating-medium, currency, depreciation of currency, paper, bullion, rates of exchange, value of precious metals in the market, and so forth; but looking down at the little chair, and seeing what a long way down it was, he answered: 'Gold, and silver, and copper. Guineas, shillings, half-pence. You know what they are?'

'Oh yes, I know what they are,' said Paul. 'I don't mean that, Papa. I mean what's money after all?'

Heaven and Earth, how old his face was as he turned it up again towards his father's!

'What is money after all!' said Mr Dombey, backing his chair a little, that he might the better gaze in sheer amazement at the presumptuous atom that propounded such an inquiry.

'I mean, Papa, what can it do?' returned Paul, folding his arms (they were hardly long enough to fold), and looking at the fire, and up at him, and at the fire, and up at him again.

Mr Dombey drew his chair back to its former place, and patted him on the head. 'You'll know better by-and-by, my man,' he

said. ‘Money, Paul, can do anything.’ He took hold of the little hand, and beat it softly against one of his own, as he said so.

But Paul got his hand free as soon as he could; and rubbing it gently to and fro on the elbow of his chair, as if his wit were in the palm, and he were sharpening it – and looking at the fire again, as though the fire had been his adviser and prompter – repeated, after a short pause:

‘Anything, Papa?’

‘Yes. Anything – almost,’ said Mr Dombey.

‘Anything means everything, don’t it, Papa?’ asked his son: not observing, or possibly not understanding, the qualification.

‘It includes it: yes,’ said Mr Dombey.

‘Why didn’t money save me my Mama?’ returned the child. ‘It isn’t cruel, is it?’

‘Cruel!’ said Mr Dombey, settling his neckcloth, and seeming to resent the idea. ‘No. A good thing can’t be cruel.’

‘If it’s a good thing, and can do anything,’ said the little fellow, thoughtfully, as he looked back at the fire, ‘I wonder why it didn’t save me my Mama.’

He didn’t ask the question of his father this time. Perhaps he had seen, with a child’s quickness, that it had already made his father uncomfortable. But he repeated the thought aloud, as if it were quite an old one to him, and had troubled him very much; and sat with his chin resting on his hand, still cogitating and looking for an explanation in the fire.

Mr Dombey having recovered from his surprise, not to say

his alarm (for it was the very first occasion on which the child had ever broached the subject of his mother to him, though he had had him sitting by his side, in this same manner, evening after evening), expounded to him how that money, though a very potent spirit, never to be disparaged on any account whatever, could not keep people alive whose time was come to die; and how that we must all die, unfortunately, even in the City, though we were never so rich. But how that money caused us to be honoured, feared, respected, courted, and admired, and made us powerful and glorious in the eyes of all men; and how that it could, very often, even keep off death, for a long time together. How, for example, it had secured to his Mama the services of Mr Pilkins, by which he, Paul, had often profited himself; likewise of the great Doctor Parker Peps, whom he had never known. And how it could do all, that could be done. This, with more to the same purpose, Mr Dombey instilled into the mind of his son, who listened attentively, and seemed to understand the greater part of what was said to him.

'It can't make me strong and quite well, either, Papa; can it?' asked Paul, after a short silence; rubbing his tiny hands.

'Why, you are strong and quite well,' returned Mr Dombey. 'Are you not?'

Oh! the age of the face that was turned up again, with an expression, half of melancholy, half of slyness, on it!

'You are as strong and well as such little people usually are? Eh?' said Mr Dombey.

‘Florence is older than I am, but I’m not as strong and well as Florence, ‘I know,’ returned the child; ‘and I believe that when Florence was as little as me, she could play a great deal longer at a time without tiring herself. I am so tired sometimes,’ said little Paul, warming his hands, and looking in between the bars of the grate, as if some ghostly puppet-show were performing there, ‘and my bones ache so (Wickam says it’s my bones), that I don’t know what to do.’

‘Ay! But that’s at night,’ said Mr Dombey, drawing his own chair closer to his son’s, and laying his hand gently on his back; ‘little people should be tired at night, for then they sleep well.’

‘Oh, it’s not at night, Papa,’ returned the child, ‘it’s in the day; and I lie down in Florence’s lap, and she sings to me. At night I dream about such cu-ri-ous things!’

And he went on, warming his hands again, and thinking about them, like an old man or a young goblin.

Mr Dombey was so astonished, and so uncomfortable, and so perfectly at a loss how to pursue the conversation, that he could only sit looking at his son by the light of the fire, with his hand resting on his back, as if it were detained there by some magnetic attraction. Once he advanced his other hand, and turned the contemplative face towards his own for a moment. But it sought the fire again as soon as he released it; and remained, addressed towards the flickering blaze, until the nurse appeared, to summon him to bed.

‘I want Florence to come for me,’ said Paul.

‘Won’t you come with your poor Nurse Wickam, Master Paul?’ inquired that attendant, with great pathos.

‘No, I won’t,’ replied Paul, composing himself in his arm-chair again, like the master of the house.

Invoking a blessing upon his innocence, Mrs Wickam withdrew, and presently Florence appeared in her stead. The child immediately started up with sudden readiness and animation, and raised towards his father in bidding him good-night, a countenance so much brighter, so much younger, and so much more child-like altogether, that Mr Dombey, while he felt greatly reassured by the change, was quite amazed at it.

After they had left the room together, he thought he heard a soft voice singing; and remembering that Paul had said his sister sung to him, he had the curiosity to open the door and listen, and look after them. She was toiling up the great, wide, vacant staircase, with him in her arms; his head was lying on her shoulder, one of his arms thrown negligently round her neck. So they went, toiling up; she singing all the way, and Paul sometimes crooning out a feeble accompaniment. Mr Dombey looked after them until they reached the top of the staircase – not without halting to rest by the way – and passed out of his sight; and then he still stood gazing upwards, until the dull rays of the moon, glimmering in a melancholy manner through the dim skylight, sent him back to his room.

Mrs Chick and Miss Tox were convoked in council at dinner next day; and when the cloth was removed, Mr Dombey opened

the proceedings by requiring to be informed, without any gloss or reservation, whether there was anything the matter with Paul, and what Mr Pilkins said about him.

'For the child is hardly,' said Mr Dombey, 'as stout as I could wish.'

'My dear Paul,' returned Mrs Chick, 'with your usual happy discrimination, which I am weak enough to envy you, every time I am in your company; and so I think is Miss Tox.'

'Oh my dear!' said Miss Tox, softly, 'how could it be otherwise? Presumptuous as it is to aspire to such a level; still, if the bird of night may – but I'll not trouble Mr Dombey with the sentiment. It merely relates to the Bulbul.'

Mr Dombey bent his head in stately recognition of the Bulbuls as an old-established body.

'With your usual happy discrimination, my dear Paul,' resumed Mrs Chick, 'you have hit the point at once. Our darling is altogether as stout as we could wish. The fact is, that his mind is too much for him. His soul is a great deal too large for his frame. I am sure the way in which that dear child talks!' said Mrs Chick, shaking her head; 'no one would believe. His expressions, Lucretia, only yesterday upon the subject of Funerals!'

'I am afraid,' said Mr Dombey, interrupting her testily, 'that some of those persons upstairs suggest improper subjects to the child. He was speaking to me last night about his – about his Bones,' said Mr Dombey, laying an irritated stress upon the word. 'What on earth has anybody to do with the – with the – Bones of

my son? He is not a living skeleton, I suppose.'

'Very far from it,' said Mrs Chick, with unspeakable expression.

'I hope so,' returned her brother. 'Funerals again! who talks to the child of funerals? We are not undertakers, or mutes, or grave-diggers, I believe.'

'Very far from it,' interposed Mrs Chick, with the same profound expression as before.

'Then who puts such things into his head?' said Mr Dombey. 'Really I was quite dismayed and shocked last night. Who puts such things into his head, Louisa?'

'My dear Paul,' said Mrs Chick, after a moment's silence, 'it is of no use inquiring. I do not think, I will tell you candidly that Wickam is a person of very cheerful spirit, or what one would call a – '

'A daughter of Momus,' Miss Tox softly suggested.

'Exactly so,' said Mrs Chick; 'but she is exceedingly attentive and useful, and not at all presumptuous; indeed I never saw a more biddable woman. I would say that for her, if I was put upon my trial before a Court of Justice.'

'Well! you are not put upon your trial before a Court of Justice, at present, Louisa,' returned Mr Dombey, chafing, 'and therefore it don't matter.'

'My dear Paul,' said Mrs Chick, in a warning voice, 'I must be spoken to kindly, or there is an end of me,' at the same time a premonitory redness developed itself in Mrs Chick's eyelids

which was an invariable sign of rain, unless the weather changed directly.

'I was inquiring, Louisa,' observed Mr Dombey, in an altered voice, and after a decent interval, 'about Paul's health and actual state.'

'If the dear child,' said Mrs Chick, in the tone of one who was summing up what had been previously quite agreed upon, instead of saying it all for the first time, 'is a little weakened by that last attack, and is not in quite such vigorous health as we could wish; and if he has some temporary weakness in his system, and does occasionally seem about to lose, for the moment, the use of his – '

Mrs Chick was afraid to say limbs, after Mr Dombey's recent objection to bones, and therefore waited for a suggestion from Miss Tox, who, true to her office, hazarded 'members.'

'Members!' repeated Mr Dombey.

'I think the medical gentleman mentioned legs this morning, my dear Louisa, did he not?' said Miss Tox.

'Why, of course he did, my love,' retorted Mrs Chick, mildly reproachful. 'How can you ask me? You heard him. I say, if our dear Paul should lose, for the moment, the use of his legs, these are casualties common to many children at his time of life, and not to be prevented by any care or caution. The sooner you understand that, Paul, and admit that, the better. If you have any doubt as to the amount of care, and caution, and affection, and self-sacrifice, that has been bestowed upon little Paul, I should wish to refer the question to your medical attendant, or to any of

your dependants in this house. Call Towlinson,' said Mrs Chick, 'I believe he has no prejudice in our favour; quite the contrary. I should wish to hear what accusation Towlinson can make!'

'Surely you must know, Louisa,' observed Mr Dombey, 'that I don't question your natural devotion to, and regard for, the future head of my house.'

'I am glad to hear it, Paul,' said Mrs Chick; 'but really you are very odd, and sometimes talk very strangely, though without meaning it, I know. If your dear boy's soul is too much for his body, Paul, you should remember whose fault that is – who he takes after, I mean – and make the best of it. He's as like his Papa as he can be. People have noticed it in the streets. The very beadle, I am informed, observed it, so long ago as at his christening. He's a very respectable man, with children of his own. He ought to know.'

'Mr Pilkins saw Paul this morning, I believe?' said Mr Dombey.

'Yes, he did,' returned his sister. 'Miss Tox and myself were present. Miss Tox and myself are always present. We make a point of it. Mr Pilkins has seen him for some days past, and a very clever man I believe him to be. He says it is nothing to speak of; which I can confirm, if that is any consolation; but he recommended, to-day, sea-air. Very wisely, Paul, I feel convinced.'

'Sea-air,' repeated Mr Dombey, looking at his sister.

'There is nothing to be made uneasy by, in that,' said Mrs

Chick. 'My George and Frederick were both ordered sea-air, when they were about his age; and I have been ordered it myself a great many times. I quite agree with you, Paul, that perhaps topics may be incautiously mentioned upstairs before him, which it would be as well for his little mind not to expatiate upon; but I really don't see how that is to be helped, in the case of a child of his quickness. If he were a common child, there would be nothing in it. I must say I think, with Miss Tox, that a short absence from this house, the air of Brighton, and the bodily and mental training of so judicious a person as Mrs Pipchin for instance – '

'Who is Mrs Pipchin, Louisa?' asked Mr Dombey; aghast at this familiar introduction of a name he had never heard before.

'Mrs Pipchin, my dear Paul,' returned his sister, 'is an elderly lady – Miss Tox knows her whole history – who has for some time devoted all the energies of her mind, with the greatest success, to the study and treatment of infancy, and who has been extremely well connected. Her husband broke his heart in – how did you say her husband broke his heart, my dear? I forget the precise circumstances.

'In pumping water out of the Peruvian Mines,' replied Miss Tox.

'Not being a Pumper himself, of course,' said Mrs Chick, glancing at her brother; and it really did seem necessary to offer the explanation, for Miss Tox had spoken of him as if he had died at the handle; 'but having invested money in the speculation, which failed. I believe that Mrs Pipchin's management of

children is quite astonishing. I have heard it commended in private circles ever since I was – dear me – how high!' Mrs Chick's eye wandered about the bookcase near the bust of Mr Pitt, which was about ten feet from the ground.

'Perhaps I should say of Mrs Pipchin, my dear Sir,' observed Miss Tox, with an ingenuous blush, 'having been so pointedly referred to, that the encomium which has been passed upon her by your sweet sister is well merited. Many ladies and gentleman, now grown up to be interesting members of society, have been indebted to her care. The humble individual who addresses you was once under her charge. I believe juvenile nobility itself is no stranger to her establishment.'

'Do I understand that this respectable matron keeps an establishment, Miss Tox?' the Mr Dombey, condescendingly.

'Why, I really don't know,' rejoined that lady, 'whether I am justified in calling it so. It is not a Preparatory School by any means. Should I express my meaning,' said Miss Tox, with peculiar sweetness, 'if I designated it an infantine Boarding-House of a very select description?'

'On an exceedingly limited and particular scale,' suggested Mrs Chick, with a glance at her brother.

'Oh! Exclusion itself!' said Miss Tox.

There was something in this. Mrs Pipchin's husband having broken his heart of the Peruvian mines was good. It had a rich sound. Besides, Mr Dombey was in a state almost amounting to consternation at the idea of Paul remaining where he was one

hour after his removal had been recommended by the medical practitioner. It was a stoppage and delay upon the road the child must traverse, slowly at the best, before the goal was reached. Their recommendation of Mrs Pipchin had great weight with him; for he knew that they were jealous of any interference with their charge, and he never for a moment took it into account that they might be solicitous to divide a responsibility, of which he had, as shown just now, his own established views. Broke his heart of the Peruvian mines, mused Mr Dombey. Well! a very respectable way of doing It.

'Supposing we should decide, on to-morrow's inquiries, to send Paul down to Brighton to this lady, who would go with him?' inquired Mr Dombey, after some reflection.

'I don't think you could send the child anywhere at present without Florence, my dear Paul,' returned his sister, hesitating. 'It's quite an infatuation with him. He's very young, you know, and has his fancies.'

Mr Dombey turned his head away, and going slowly to the bookcase, and unlocking it, brought back a book to read.

'Anybody else, Louisa?' he said, without looking up, and turning over the leaves.

'Wickam, of course. Wickam would be quite sufficient, I should say,' returned his sister. 'Paul being in such hands as Mrs Pipchin's, you could hardly send anybody who would be a further check upon her. You would go down yourself once a week at least, of course.'

‘Of course,’ said Mr Dombey; and sat looking at one page for an hour afterwards, without reading one word.

This celebrated Mrs Pipchin was a marvellous ill-favoured, ill-conditioned old lady, of a stooping figure, with a mottled face, like bad marble, a hook nose, and a hard grey eye, that looked as if it might have been hammered at on an anvil without sustaining any injury. Forty years at least had elapsed since the Peruvian mines had been the death of Mr Pipchin; but his relict still wore black bombazeen, of such a lustreless, deep, dead, sombre shade, that gas itself couldn’t light her up after dark, and her presence was a quencher to any number of candles. She was generally spoken of as ‘a great manager’ of children; and the secret of her management was, to give them everything that they didn’t like, and nothing that they did – which was found to sweeten their dispositions very much. She was such a bitter old lady, that one was tempted to believe there had been some mistake in the application of the Peruvian machinery, and that all her waters of gladness and milk of human kindness, had been pumped out dry, instead of the mines.

The Castle of this ogress and child-queller was in a steep by-street at Brighton; where the soil was more than usually chalky, flinty, and sterile, and the houses were more than usually brittle and thin; where the small front-gardens had the unaccountable property of producing nothing but marigolds, whatever was sown in them; and where snails were constantly discovered holding on to the street doors, and other public places they were not

expected to ornament, with the tenacity of cupping-glasses. In the winter time the air couldn't be got out of the Castle, and in the summer time it couldn't be got in. There was such a continual reverberation of wind in it, that it sounded like a great shell, which the inhabitants were obliged to hold to their ears night and day, whether they liked it or no. It was not, naturally, a fresh-smelling house; and in the window of the front parlour, which was never opened, Mrs Pipchin kept a collection of plants in pots, which imparted an earthy flavour of their own to the establishment. However choice examples of their kind, too, these plants were of a kind peculiarly adapted to the embowerment of Mrs Pipchin. There were half-a-dozen specimens of the cactus, writhing round bits of lath, like hairy serpents; another specimen shooting out broad claws, like a green lobster; several creeping vegetables, possessed of sticky and adhesive leaves; and one uncomfortable flower-pot hanging to the ceiling, which appeared to have boiled over, and tickling people underneath with its long green ends, reminded them of spiders – in which Mrs Pipchin's dwelling was uncommonly prolific, though perhaps it challenged competition still more proudly, in the season, in point of earwigs.

Mrs Pipchin's scale of charges being high, however, to all who could afford to pay, and Mrs Pipchin very seldom sweetening the equable acidity of her nature in favour of anybody, she was held to be an old 'lady of remarkable firmness, who was quite scientific in her knowledge of the childish character.' On this reputation, and on the broken heart of Mr Pipchin,

she had contrived, taking one year with another, to eke out a tolerable sufficient living since her husband's demise. Within three days after Mrs Chick's first allusion to her, this excellent old lady had the satisfaction of anticipating a handsome addition to her current receipts, from the pocket of Mr Dombey; and of receiving Florence and her little brother Paul, as inmates of the Castle.

Mrs Chick and Miss Tox, who had brought them down on the previous night (which they all passed at an Hotel), had just driven away from the door, on their journey home again; and Mrs Pipchin, with her back to the fire, stood, reviewing the new-comers, like an old soldier. Mrs Pipchin's middle-aged niece, her good-natured and devoted slave, but possessing a gaunt and iron-bound aspect, and much afflicted with boils on her nose, was divesting Master Bitherstone of the clean collar he had worn on parade. Miss Pankey, the only other little boarder at present, had that moment been walked off to the Castle Dungeon (an empty apartment at the back, devoted to correctional purposes), for having sniffed thrice, in the presence of visitors.

'Well, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin to Paul, 'how do you think you shall like me?'

'I don't think I shall like you at all,' replied Paul. 'I want to go away. This isn't my house.'

'No. It's mine,' retorted Mrs Pipchin.

'It's a very nasty one,' said Paul.

'There's a worse place in it than this though,' said Mrs Pipchin,

‘where we shut up our bad boys.’

‘Has he ever been in it?’ asked Paul: pointing out Master Bitherstone.

Mrs Pipchin nodded assent; and Paul had enough to do, for the rest of that day, in surveying Master Bitherstone from head to foot, and watching all the workings of his countenance, with the interest attaching to a boy of mysterious and terrible experiences.

At one o’clock there was a dinner, chiefly of the farinaceous and vegetable kind, when Miss Pankey (a mild little blue-eyed morsel of a child, who was shampoo’d every morning, and seemed in danger of being rubbed away, altogether) was led in from captivity by the ogress herself, and instructed that nobody who sniffed before visitors ever went to Heaven. When this great truth had been thoroughly impressed upon her, she was regaled with rice; and subsequently repeated the form of grace established in the Castle, in which there was a special clause, thanking Mrs Pipchin for a good dinner. Mrs Pipchin’s niece, Berinthia, took cold pork. Mrs Pipchin, whose constitution required warm nourishment, made a special repast of mutton-chops, which were brought in hot and hot, between two plates, and smelt very nice.

As it rained after dinner, and they couldn’t go out walking on the beach, and Mrs Pipchin’s constitution required rest after chops, they went away with Berry (otherwise Berinthia) to the Dungeon; an empty room looking out upon a chalk wall and a water-butt, and made ghastly by a ragged fireplace without any

stove in it. Enlivened by company, however, this was the best place after all; for Berry played with them there, and seemed to enjoy a game at romps as much as they did; until Mrs Pipchin knocking angrily at the wall, like the Cock Lane Ghost revived, they left off, and Berry told them stories in a whisper until twilight.

For tea there was plenty of milk and water, and bread and butter, with a little black tea-pot for Mrs Pipchin and Berry, and buttered toast unlimited for Mrs Pipchin, which was brought in, hot and hot, like the chops. Though Mrs Pipchin got very greasy, outside, over this dish, it didn't seem to lubricate her internally, at all; for she was as fierce as ever, and the hard grey eye knew no softening.

After tea, Berry brought out a little work-box, with the Royal Pavilion on the lid, and fell to working busily; while Mrs Pipchin, having put on her spectacles and opened a great volume bound in green baize, began to nod. And whenever Mrs Pipchin caught herself falling forward into the fire, and woke up, she filliped Master Bitherstone on the nose for nodding too.

At last it was the children's bedtime, and after prayers they went to bed. As little Miss Pankey was afraid of sleeping alone in the dark, Mrs Pipchin always made a point of driving her upstairs herself, like a sheep; and it was cheerful to hear Miss Pankey moaning long afterwards, in the least eligible chamber, and Mrs Pipchin now and then going in to shake her. At about half-past nine o'clock the odour of a warm sweet-bread (Mrs Pipchin's

constitution wouldn't go to sleep without sweet-bread) diversified the prevailing fragrance of the house, which Mrs Wickam said was 'a smell of building;' and slumber fell upon the Castle shortly after.

The breakfast next morning was like the tea over night, except that Mrs Pipchin took her roll instead of toast, and seemed a little more irate when it was over. Master Bitherstone read aloud to the rest a pedigree from Genesis (judiciously selected by Mrs Pipchin), getting over the names with the ease and clearness of a person tumbling up the treadmill. That done, Miss Pankey was borne away to be shampoo'd; and Master Bitherstone to have something else done to him with salt water, from which he always returned very blue and dejected. Paul and Florence went out in the meantime on the beach with Wickam – who was constantly in tears – and at about noon Mrs Pipchin presided over some Early Readings. It being a part of Mrs Pipchin's system not to encourage a child's mind to develop and expand itself like a young flower, but to open it by force like an oyster, the moral of these lessons was usually of a violent and stunning character: the hero – a naughty boy – seldom, in the mildest catastrophe, being finished off anything less than a lion, or a bear.

Such was life at Mrs Pipchin's. On Saturday Mr Dombey came down; and Florence and Paul would go to his Hotel, and have tea. They passed the whole of Sunday with him, and generally rode out before dinner; and on these occasions Mr Dombey seemed to grow, like Falstaff's assailants, and instead of being one man

in buckram, to become a dozen. Sunday evening was the most melancholy evening in the week; for Mrs Pipchin always made a point of being particularly cross on Sunday nights. Miss Pankey was generally brought back from an aunt's at Rottingdean, in deep distress; and Master Bitherstone, whose relatives were all in India, and who was required to sit, between the services, in an erect position with his head against the parlour wall, neither moving hand nor foot, suffered so acutely in his young spirits that he once asked Florence, on a Sunday night, if she could give him any idea of the way back to Bengal.

But it was generally said that Mrs Pipchin was a woman of system with children; and no doubt she was. Certainly the wild ones went home tame enough, after sojourning for a few months beneath her hospitable roof. It was generally said, too, that it was highly creditable of Mrs Pipchin to have devoted herself to this way of life, and to have made such a sacrifice of her feelings, and such a resolute stand against her troubles, when Mr Pipchin broke his heart in the Peruvian mines.

At this exemplary old lady, Paul would sit staring in his little arm-chair by the fire, for any length of time. He never seemed to know what weariness was, when he was looking fixedly at Mrs Pipchin. He was not fond of her; he was not afraid of her; but in those old, old moods of his, she seemed to have a grotesque attraction for him. There he would sit, looking at her, and warming his hands, and looking at her, until he sometimes quite confounded Mrs Pipchin, Ogress as she was. Once she

asked him, when they were alone, what he was thinking about.

'You,' said Paul, without the least reserve.

'And what are you thinking about me?' asked Mrs Pipchin.

'I'm thinking how old you must be,' said Paul.

'You mustn't say such things as that, young gentleman,' returned the dame. 'That'll never do.'

'Why not?' asked Paul.

'Because it's not polite,' said Mrs Pipchin, snappishly.

'Not polite?' said Paul.

'No.'

'It's not polite,' said Paul, innocently, 'to eat all the mutton chops and toast', Wickam says.

'Wickam,' retorted Mrs Pipchin, colouring, 'is a wicked, impudent, bold-faced hussy.'

'What's that?' inquired Paul.

'Never you mind, Sir,' retorted Mrs Pipchin. 'Remember the story of the little boy that was gored to death by a mad bull for asking questions.'

'If the bull was mad,' said Paul, 'how did he know that the boy had asked questions? Nobody can go and whisper secrets to a mad bull. I don't believe that story.'

'You don't believe it, Sir?' repeated Mrs Pipchin, amazed.

'No,' said Paul.

'Not if it should happen to have been a tame bull, you little Infidel?' said Mrs Pipchin.

As Paul had not considered the subject in that light, and had

founded his conclusions on the alleged lunacy of the bull, he allowed himself to be put down for the present. But he sat turning it over in his mind, with such an obvious intention of fixing Mrs Pipchin presently, that even that hardy old lady deemed it prudent to retreat until he should have forgotten the subject.

From that time, Mrs Pipchin appeared to have something of the same odd kind of attraction towards Paul, as Paul had towards her. She would make him move his chair to her side of the fire, instead of sitting opposite; and there he would remain in a nook between Mrs Pipchin and the fender, with all the light of his little face absorbed into the black bombazeen drapery, studying every line and wrinkle of her countenance, and peering at the hard grey eye, until Mrs Pipchin was sometimes fain to shut it, on pretence of dozing. Mrs Pipchin had an old black cat, who generally lay coiled upon the centre foot of the fender, purring egotistically, and winking at the fire until the contracted pupils of his eyes were like two notes of admiration. The good old lady might have been – not to record it disrespectfully – a witch, and Paul and the cat her two familiars, as they all sat by the fire together. It would have been quite in keeping with the appearance of the party if they had all sprung up the chimney in a high wind one night, and never been heard of any more.

This, however, never came to pass. The cat, and Paul, and Mrs Pipchin, were constantly to be found in their usual places after dark; and Paul, eschewing the companionship of Master Bitherstone, went on studying Mrs Pipchin, and the cat, and the

fire, night after night, as if they were a book of necromancy, in three volumes.

Mrs Wickam put her own construction on Paul's eccentricities; and being confirmed in her low spirits by a perplexed view of chimneys from the room where she was accustomed to sit, and by the noise of the wind, and by the general dulness (gashliness was Mrs Wickam's strong expression) of her present life, deduced the most dismal reflections from the foregoing premises. It was a part of Mrs Pipchin's policy to prevent her own 'young hussy' – that was Mrs Pipchin's generic name for female servant – from communicating with Mrs Wickam: to which end she devoted much of her time to concealing herself behind doors, and springing out on that devoted maiden, whenever she made an approach towards Mrs Wickam's apartment. But Berry was free to hold what converse she could in that quarter, consistently with the discharge of the multifarious duties at which she toiled incessantly from morning to night; and to Berry Mrs Wickam unburdened her mind.

'What a pretty fellow he is when he's asleep!' said Berry, stopping to look at Paul in bed, one night when she took up Mrs Wickam's supper.

'Ah!' sighed Mrs Wickam. 'He need be.'

'Why, he's not ugly when he's awake,' observed Berry.

'No, Ma'am. Oh, no. No more was my Uncle's Betsey Jane,' said Mrs Wickam.

Berry looked as if she would like to trace the connexion of

ideas between Paul Dombey and Mrs Wickam's Uncle's Betsey Jane.

'My Uncle's wife,' Mrs Wickam went on to say, 'died just like his Mama. My Uncle's child took on just as Master Paul do.'

'Took on! You don't think he grieves for his Mama, sure?' argued Berry, sitting down on the side of the bed. 'He can't remember anything about her, you know, Mrs Wickam. It's not possible.'

'No, Ma'am,' said Mrs Wickam 'No more did my Uncle's child. But my Uncle's child said very strange things sometimes, and looked very strange, and went on very strange, and was very strange altogether. My Uncle's child made people's blood run cold, some times, she did!'

'How?' asked Berry.

'I wouldn't have sat up all night alone with Betsey Jane!' said Mrs Wickam, 'not if you'd have put Wickam into business next morning for himself. I couldn't have done it, Miss Berry.

Miss Berry naturally asked why not? But Mrs Wickam, agreeably to the usage of some ladies in her condition, pursued her own branch of the subject, without any compunction.

'Betsey Jane,' said Mrs Wickam, 'was as sweet a child as I could wish to see. I couldn't wish to see a sweeter. Everything that a child could have in the way of illnesses, Betsey Jane had come through. The cramps was as common to her,' said Mrs Wickam, 'as biles is to yourself, Miss Berry.' Miss Berry involuntarily wrinkled her nose.

‘But Betsey Jane,’ said Mrs Wickam, lowering her voice, and looking round the room, and towards Paul in bed, ‘had been minded, in her cradle, by her departed mother. I couldn’t say how, nor I couldn’t say when, nor I couldn’t say whether the dear child knew it or not, but Betsey Jane had been watched by her mother, Miss Berry!’ and Mrs Wickam, with a very white face, and with watery eyes, and with a tremulous voice, again looked fearfully round the room, and towards Paul in bed.

‘Nonsense!’ cried Miss Berry – somewhat resentful of the idea.

‘You may say nonsense! I ain’t offended, Miss. I hope you may be able to think in your own conscience that it is nonsense; you’ll find your spirits all the better for it in this – you’ll excuse my being so free – in this burying-ground of a place; which is wearing of me down. Master Paul’s a little restless in his sleep. Pat his back, if you please.’

‘Of course you think,’ said Berry, gently doing what she was asked, ‘that he has been nursed by his mother, too?’

‘Betsey Jane,’ returned Mrs Wickam in her most solemn tones, ‘was put upon as that child has been put upon, and changed as that child has changed. I have seen her sit, often and often, think, think, thinking, like him. I have seen her look, often and often, old, old, old, like him. I have heard her, many a time, talk just like him. I consider that child and Betsey Jane on the same footing entirely, Miss Berry.’

‘Is your Uncle’s child alive?’ asked Berry.

‘Yes, Miss, she is alive,’ returned Mrs Wickam with an air of triumph, for it was evident. Miss Berry expected the reverse; ‘and is married to a silver-chaser. Oh yes, Miss, SHE is alive,’ said Mrs Wickam, laying strong stress on her nominative case.

It being clear that somebody was dead, Mrs Pipchin’s niece inquired who it was.

‘I wouldn’t wish to make you uneasy,’ returned Mrs Wickam, pursuing her supper. ‘Don’t ask me.’

This was the surest way of being asked again. Miss Berry repeated her question, therefore; and after some resistance, and reluctance, Mrs Wickam laid down her knife, and again glancing round the room and at Paul in bed, replied:

‘She took fancies to people; whimsical fancies, some of them; others, affections that one might expect to see – only stronger than common. They all died.’

This was so very unexpected and awful to Mrs Pipchin’s niece, that she sat upright on the hard edge of the bedstead, breathing short, and surveying her informant with looks of undisguised alarm.

Mrs Wickam shook her left fore-finger stealthily towards the bed where Florence lay; then turned it upside down, and made several emphatic points at the floor; immediately below which was the parlour in which Mrs Pipchin habitually consumed the toast.

‘Remember my words, Miss Berry,’ said Mrs Wickam, ‘and be thankful that Master Paul is not too fond of you. I am, that

he's not too fond of me, I assure you; though there isn't much to live for – you'll excuse my being so free – in this jail of a house!'

Miss Berry's emotion might have led to her patting Paul too hard on the back, or might have produced a cessation of that soothing monotony, but he turned in his bed just now, and, presently awaking, sat up in it with his hair hot and wet from the effects of some childish dream, and asked for Florence.

She was out of her own bed at the first sound of his voice; and bending over his pillow immediately, sang him to sleep again. Mrs Wickam shaking her head, and letting fall several tears, pointed out the little group to Berry, and turned her eyes up to the ceiling.

'He's asleep now, my dear,' said Mrs Wickam after a pause, 'you'd better go to bed again. Don't you feel cold?'

'No, nurse,' said Florence, laughing. 'Not at all.'

'Ah!' sighed Mrs Wickam, and she shook her head again, expressing to the watchful Berry, 'we shall be cold enough, some of us, by and by!'

Berry took the frugal supper-tray, with which Mrs Wickam had by this time done, and bade her good-night.

'Good-night, Miss!' returned Wickam softly. 'Good-night! Your aunt is an old lady, Miss Berry, and it's what you must have looked for, often.'

This consolatory farewell, Mrs Wickam accompanied with a look of heartfelt anguish; and being left alone with the two children again, and becoming conscious that the wind was

blowing mournfully, she indulged in melancholy – that cheapest and most accessible of luxuries – until she was overpowered by slumber.

Although the niece of Mrs Pipchin did not expect to find that exemplary dragon prostrate on the hearth-rug when she went downstairs, she was relieved to find her unusually fractious and severe, and with every present appearance of intending to live a long time to be a comfort to all who knew her. Nor had she any symptoms of declining, in the course of the ensuing week, when the constitutional viands still continued to disappear in regular succession, notwithstanding that Paul studied her as attentively as ever, and occupied his usual seat between the black skirts and the fender, with unwavering constancy.

But as Paul himself was no stronger at the expiration of that time than he had been on his first arrival, though he looked much healthier in the face, a little carriage was got for him, in which he could lie at his ease, with an alphabet and other elementary works of reference, and be wheeled down to the sea-side. Consistent in his odd tastes, the child set aside a ruddy-faced lad who was proposed as the drawer of this carriage, and selected, instead, his grandfather – a weazen, old, crab-faced man, in a suit of battered oilskin, who had got tough and stringy from long pickling in salt water, and who smelt like a weedy sea-beach when the tide is out.

With this notable attendant to pull him along, and Florence always walking by his side, and the despondent Wickam bringing up the rear, he went down to the margin of the ocean every day;

and there he would sit or lie in his carriage for hours together: never so distressed as by the company of children – Florence alone excepted, always.

'Go away, if you please,' he would say to any child who came to bear him company. 'Thank you, but I don't want you.'

Some small voice, near his ear, would ask him how he was, perhaps.

'I am very well, I thank you,' he would answer. 'But you had better go and play, if you please.'

Then he would turn his head, and watch the child away, and say to Florence, 'We don't want any others, do we? Kiss me, Floy.'

He had even a dislike, at such times, to the company of Wickam, and was well pleased when she strolled away, as she generally did, to pick up shells and acquaintances. His favourite spot was quite a lonely one, far away from most loungers; and with Florence sitting by his side at work, or reading to him, or talking to him, and the wind blowing on his face, and the water coming up among the wheels of his bed, he wanted nothing more.

'Floy,' he said one day, 'where's India, where that boy's friends live?'

'Oh, it's a long, long distance off,' said Florence, raising her eyes from her work.

'Weeks off?' asked Paul.

'Yes dear. Many weeks' journey, night and day.'

'If you were in India, Floy,' said Paul, after being silent for a

minute, 'I should – what is it that Mama did? I forget.'

'Loved me!' answered Florence.

'No, no. Don't I love you now, Floy? What is it? – Died. If you were in India, I should die, Floy.'

She hurriedly put her work aside, and laid her head down on his pillow, caressing him. And so would she, she said, if he were there. He would be better soon.

'Oh! I am a great deal better now!' he answered. 'I don't mean that. I mean that I should die of being so sorry and so lonely, Floy!'

Another time, in the same place, he fell asleep, and slept quietly for a long time. Awaking suddenly, he listened, started up, and sat listening.

Florence asked him what he thought he heard.

'I want to know what it says,' he answered, looking steadily in her face. 'The sea' Floy, what is it that it keeps on saying?'

She told him that it was only the noise of the rolling waves.

'Yes, yes,' he said. 'But I know that they are always saying something. Always the same thing. What place is over there?' He rose up, looking eagerly at the horizon.

She told him that there was another country opposite, but he said he didn't mean that: he meant further away – farther away!

Very often afterwards, in the midst of their talk, he would break off, to try to understand what it was that the waves were always saying; and would rise up in his couch to look towards that invisible region, far away.

CHAPTER 9. In which the Wooden Midshipman gets into Trouble

That spice of romance and love of the marvellous, of which there was a pretty strong infusion in the nature of young Walter Gay, and which the guardianship of his Uncle, old Solomon Gills, had not very much weakened by the waters of stern practical experience, was the occasion of his attaching an uncommon and delightful interest to the adventure of Florence with Good Mrs Brown. He pampered and cherished it in his memory, especially that part of it with which he had been associated: until it became the spoiled child of his fancy, and took its own way, and did what it liked with it.

The recollection of those incidents, and his own share in them, may have been made the more captivating, perhaps, by the weekly dreamings of old Sol and Captain Cuttle on Sundays. Hardly a Sunday passed, without mysterious references being made by one or other of those worthy chums to Richard Whittington; and the latter gentleman had even gone so far as to purchase a ballad of considerable antiquity, that had long fluttered among many others, chiefly expressive of maritime sentiments, on a dead wall in the Commercial Road: which poetical performance set forth the courtship and nuptials of a promising young coal-whipper with a certain 'lovely Peg,'

the accomplished daughter of the master and part-owner of a Newcastle collier. In this stirring legend, Captain Cuttle descried a profound metaphysical bearing on the case of Walter and Florence; and it excited him so much, that on very festive occasions, as birthdays and a few other non-Dominical holidays, he would roar through the whole song in the little back parlour; making an amazing shake on the word Pe-e-eg, with which every verse concluded, in compliment to the heroine of the piece.

But a frank, free-spirited, open-hearted boy, is not much given to analysing the nature of his own feelings, however strong their hold upon him: and Walter would have found it difficult to decide this point. He had a great affection for the wharf where he had encountered Florence, and for the streets (albeit not enchanting in themselves) by which they had come home. The shoes that had so often tumbled off by the way, he preserved in his own room; and, sitting in the little back parlour of an evening, he had drawn a whole gallery of fancy portraits of Good Mrs Brown. It may be that he became a little smarter in his dress after that memorable occasion; and he certainly liked in his leisure time to walk towards that quarter of the town where Mr Dombey's house was situated, on the vague chance of passing little Florence in the street. But the sentiment of all this was as boyish and innocent as could be. Florence was very pretty, and it is pleasant to admire a pretty face. Florence was defenceless and weak, and it was a proud thought that he had been able to render her any protection and assistance. Florence was the most grateful little

creature in the world, and it was delightful to see her bright gratitude beaming in her face. Florence was neglected and coldly looked upon, and his breast was full of youthful interest for the slighted child in her dull, stately home.

Thus it came about that, perhaps some half-a-dozen times in the course of the year, Walter pulled off his hat to Florence in the street, and Florence would stop to shake hands. Mrs Wickam (who, with a characteristic alteration of his name, invariably spoke of him as 'Young Graves') was so well used to this, knowing the story of their acquaintance, that she took no heed of it at all. Miss Nipper, on the other hand, rather looked out for these occasions: her sensitive young heart being secretly propitiated by Walter's good looks, and inclining to the belief that its sentiments were responded to.

In this way, Walter, so far from forgetting or losing sight of his acquaintance with Florence, only remembered it better and better. As to its adventurous beginning, and all those little circumstances which gave it a distinctive character and relish, he took them into account, more as a pleasant story very agreeable to his imagination, and not to be dismissed from it, than as a part of any matter of fact with which he was concerned. They set off Florence very much, to his fancy; but not himself. Sometimes he thought (and then he walked very fast) what a grand thing it would have been for him to have been going to sea on the day after that first meeting, and to have gone, and to have done wonders there, and to have stopped away a long time, and to have

come back an Admiral of all the colours of the dolphin, or at least a Post-Captain with epaulettes of insupportable brightness, and have married Florence (then a beautiful young woman) in spite of Mr Dombey's teeth, cravat, and watch-chain, and borne her away to the blue shores of somewhere or other, triumphantly. But these flights of fancy seldom burnished the brass plate of Dombey and Son's Offices into a tablet of golden hope, or shed a brilliant lustre on their dirty skylights; and when the Captain and Uncle Sol talked about Richard Whittington and masters' daughters, Walter felt that he understood his true position at Dombey and Son's, much better than they did.

So it was that he went on doing what he had to do from day to day, in a cheerful, pains-taking, merry spirit; and saw through the sanguine complexion of Uncle Sol and Captain Cuttle; and yet entertained a thousand indistinct and visionary fancies of his own, to which theirs were work-a-day probabilities. Such was his condition at the Pipchin period, when he looked a little older than of yore, but not much; and was the same light-footed, light-hearted, light-headed lad, as when he charged into the parlour at the head of Uncle Sol and the imaginary boarders, and lighted him to bring up the Madeira.

'Uncle Sol,' said Walter, 'I don't think you're well. You haven't eaten any breakfast. I shall bring a doctor to you, if you go on like this.'

'He can't give me what I want, my boy,' said Uncle Sol. 'At least he is in good practice if he can – and then he wouldn't.'

‘What is it, Uncle? Customers?’

‘Ay,’ returned Solomon, with a sigh. ‘Customers would do.’

‘Confound it, Uncle!’ said Walter, putting down his breakfast cup with a clatter, and striking his hand on the table: ‘when I see the people going up and down the street in shoals all day, and passing and re-passing the shop every minute, by scores, I feel half tempted to rush out, collar somebody, bring him in, and make him buy fifty pounds’ worth of instruments for ready money. What are you looking in at the door for? – ’ continued Walter, apostrophizing an old gentleman with a powdered head (inaudibly to him of course), who was staring at a ship’s telescope with all his might and main. ‘That’s no use. I could do that. Come in and buy it!’

The old gentleman, however, having satiated his curiosity, walked calmly away.

‘There he goes!’ said Walter. ‘That’s the way with ‘em all. But, Uncle – I say, Uncle Sol’ – for the old man was meditating and had not responded to his first appeal. ‘Don’t be cast down. Don’t be out of spirits, Uncle. When orders do come, they’ll come in such a crowd, you won’t be able to execute ‘em.’

‘I shall be past executing ‘em, whenever they come, my boy,’ returned Solomon Gills. ‘They’ll never come to this shop again, till I am out of t.’

‘I say, Uncle! You musn’t really, you know!’ urged Walter. ‘Don’t!’

Old Sol endeavoured to assume a cheery look, and smiled

across the little table at him as pleasantly as he could.

'There's nothing more than usual the matter; is there, Uncle?' said Walter, leaning his elbows on the tea tray, and bending over, to speak the more confidentially and kindly. 'Be open with me, Uncle, if there is, and tell me all about it.'

'No, no, no,' returned Old Sol. 'More than usual? No, no. What should there be the matter more than usual?'

Walter answered with an incredulous shake of his head. 'That's what I want to know,' he said, 'and you ask me! I'll tell you what, Uncle, when I see you like this, I am quite sorry that I live with you.'

Old Sol opened his eyes involuntarily.

'Yes. Though nobody ever was happier than I am and always have been with you, I am quite sorry that I live with you, when I see you with anything in your mind.'

'I am a little dull at such times, I know,' observed Solomon, meekly rubbing his hands.

'What I mean, Uncle Sol,' pursued Walter, bending over a little more to pat him on the shoulder, 'is, that then I feel you ought to have, sitting here and pouring out the tea instead of me, a nice little dumpling of a wife, you know, – a comfortable, capital, cosy old lady, who was just a match for you, and knew how to manage you, and keep you in good heart. Here am I, as loving a nephew as ever was (I am sure I ought to be!) but I am only a nephew, and I can't be such a companion to you when you're low and out of sorts as she would have made herself, years ago, though I'm sure

I'd give any money if I could cheer you up. And so I say, when I see you with anything on your mind, that I feel quite sorry you haven't got somebody better about you than a blundering young rough-and-tough boy like me, who has got the will to console you, Uncle, but hasn't got the way – hasn't got the way,' repeated Walter, reaching over further yet, to shake his Uncle by the hand.

'Wally, my dear boy,' said Solomon, 'if the cosy little old lady had taken her place in this parlour five and forty years ago, I never could have been fonder of her than I am of you.'

'I know that, Uncle Sol,' returned Walter. 'Lord bless you, I know that. But you wouldn't have had the whole weight of any uncomfortable secrets if she had been with you, because she would have known how to relieve you of 'em, and I don't.'

'Yes, yes, you do,' returned the Instrument-maker.

'Well then, what's the matter, Uncle Sol?' said Walter, coaxingly. 'Come! What's the matter?'

Solomon Gills persisted that there was nothing the matter; and maintained it so resolutely, that his nephew had no resource but to make a very indifferent imitation of believing him.

'All I can say is, Uncle Sol, that if there is – '

'But there isn't,' said Solomon.

'Very well,' said Walter. 'Then I've no more to say; and that's lucky, for my time's up for going to business. I shall look in by-and-by when I'm out, to see how you get on, Uncle. And mind, Uncle! I'll never believe you again, and never tell you anything more about Mr Carker the Junior, if I find out that you have been

deceiving me!'

Solomon Gills laughingly defied him to find out anything of the kind; and Walter, revolving in his thoughts all sorts of impracticable ways of making fortunes and placing the wooden Midshipman in a position of independence, betook himself to the offices of Dombey and Son with a heavier countenance than he usually carried there.

There lived in those days, round the corner – in Bishopsgate Street Without – one Brogley, sworn broker and appraiser, who kept a shop where every description of second-hand furniture was exhibited in the most uncomfortable aspect, and under circumstances and in combinations the most completely foreign to its purpose. Dozens of chairs hooked on to washing-stands, which with difficulty poised themselves on the shoulders of sideboards, which in their turn stood upon the wrong side of dining-tables, gymnastic with their legs upward on the tops of other dining-tables, were among its most reasonable arrangements. A banquet array of dish-covers, wine-glasses, and decanters was generally to be seen, spread forth upon the bosom of a four-post bedstead, for the entertainment of such genial company as half-a-dozen pokers, and a hall lamp. A set of window curtains with no windows belonging to them, would be seen gracefully draping a barricade of chests of drawers, loaded with little jars from chemists' shops; while a homeless hearthrug severed from its natural companion the fireside, braved the shrewd east wind in its adversity, and trembled in melancholy

accord with the shrill complainings of a cabinet piano, wasting away, a string a day, and faintly resounding to the noises of the street in its jangling and distracted brain. Of motionless clocks that never stirred a finger, and seemed as incapable of being successfully wound up, as the pecuniary affairs of their former owners, there was always great choice in Mr Brogley's shop; and various looking-glasses, accidentally placed at compound interest of reflection and refraction, presented to the eye an eternal perspective of bankruptcy and ruin.

Mr Brogley himself was a moist-eyed, pink-complexioned, crisp-haired man, of a bulky figure and an easy temper – for that class of Caius Marius who sits upon the ruins of other people's Carthages, can keep up his spirits well enough. He had looked in at Solomon's shop sometimes, to ask a question about articles in Solomon's way of business; and Walter knew him sufficiently to give him good day when they met in the street. But as that was the extent of the broker's acquaintance with Solomon Gills also, Walter was not a little surprised when he came back in the course of the forenoon, agreeably to his promise, to find Mr Brogley sitting in the back parlour with his hands in his pockets, and his hat hanging up behind the door.

'Well, Uncle Sol!' said Walter. The old man was sitting ruefully on the opposite side of the table, with his spectacles over his eyes, for a wonder, instead of on his forehead. 'How are you now?'

Solomon shook his head, and waved one hand towards the

broker, as introducing him.

'Is there anything the matter?' asked Walter, with a catching in his breath.

'No, no. There's nothing the matter, said Mr Brogley. 'Don't let it put you out of the way.'

Walter looked from the broker to his Uncle in mute amazement.

'The fact is,' said Mr Brogley, 'there's a little payment on a bond debt – three hundred and seventy odd, overdue: and I'm in possession.'

'In possession!' cried Walter, looking round at the shop.

'Ah!' said Mr Brogley, in confidential assent, and nodding his head as if he would urge the advisability of their all being comfortable together. 'It's an execution. That's what it is. Don't let it put you out of the way. I come myself, because of keeping it quiet and sociable. You know me. It's quite private.'

'Uncle Sol!' faltered Walter.

'Wally, my boy,' returned his uncle. 'It's the first time. Such a calamity never happened to me before. I'm an old man to begin.' Pushing up his spectacles again (for they were useless any longer to conceal his emotion), he covered his face with his hand, and sobbed aloud, and his tears fell down upon his coffee-coloured waistcoat.

'Uncle Sol! Pray! oh don't!' exclaimed Walter, who really felt a thrill of terror in seeing the old man weep. 'For God's sake don't do that. Mr Brogley, what shall I do?'

‘I should recommend you looking up a friend or so,’ said Mr Brogley, ‘and talking it over.’

‘To be sure!’ cried Walter, catching at anything. ‘Certainly! Thankee. Captain Cuttle’s the man, Uncle. Wait till I run to Captain Cuttle. Keep your eye upon my Uncle, will you, Mr Brogley, and make him as comfortable as you can while I am gone? Don’t despair, Uncle Sol. Try and keep a good heart, there’s a dear fellow!’

Saying this with great fervour, and disregarding the old man’s broken remonstrances, Walter dashed out of the shop again as hard as he could go; and, having hurried round to the office to excuse himself on the plea of his Uncle’s sudden illness, set off, full speed, for Captain Cuttle’s residence.

Everything seemed altered as he ran along the streets. There were the usual entanglement and noise of carts, drays, omnibuses, waggons, and foot passengers, but the misfortune that had fallen on the wooden Midshipman made it strange and new. Houses and shops were different from what they used to be, and bore Mr Brogley’s warrant on their fronts in large characters. The broker seemed to have got hold of the very churches; for their spires rose into the sky with an unwonted air. Even the sky itself was changed, and had an execution in it plainly.

Captain Cuttle lived on the brink of a little canal near the India Docks, where there was a swivel bridge which opened now and then to let some wandering monster of a ship come roaming up the street like a stranded leviathan. The gradual

change from land to water, on the approach to Captain Cuttle's lodgings, was curious. It began with the erection of flagstaffs, as appurtenances to public-houses; then came slop-sellers' shops, with Guernsey shirts, sou'wester hats, and canvas pantaloons, at once the tightest and the loosest of their order, hanging up outside. These were succeeded by anchor and chain-cable forges, where sledgehammers were dinging upon iron all day long. Then came rows of houses, with little vane-surmounted masts uprearing themselves from among the scarlet beans. Then, ditches. Then, pollard willows. Then, more ditches. Then, unaccountable patches of dirty water, hardly to be descried, for the ships that covered them. Then, the air was perfumed with chips; and all other trades were swallowed up in mast, oar, and block-making, and boatbuilding. Then, the ground grew marshy and unsettled. Then, there was nothing to be smelt but rum and sugar. Then, Captain Cuttle's lodgings – at once a first floor and a top storey, in Brig Place – were close before you.

The Captain was one of those timber-looking men, suits of oak as well as hearts, whom it is almost impossible for the liveliest imagination to separate from any part of their dress, however insignificant. Accordingly, when Walter knocked at the door, and the Captain instantly poked his head out of one of his little front windows, and hailed him, with the hard glared hat already on it, and the shirt-collar like a sail, and the wide suit of blue, all standing as usual, Walter was as fully persuaded that he was always in that state, as if the Captain had been a bird and

those had been his feathers.

'Wal'r, my lad!' said Captain Cuttle. 'Stand by and knock again. Hard! It's washing day.'

Walter, in his impatience, gave a prodigious thump with the knocker.

'Hard it is!' said Captain Cuttle, and immediately drew in his head, as if he expected a squall.

Nor was he mistaken: for a widow lady, with her sleeves rolled up to her shoulders, and her arms frothy with soap-suds and smoking with hot water, replied to the summons with startling rapidity. Before she looked at Walter she looked at the knocker, and then, measuring him with her eyes from head to foot, said she wondered he had left any of it.

'Captain Cuttle's at home, I know,' said Walter with a conciliatory smile.

'Is he?' replied the widow lady. 'In-deed!'

'He has just been speaking to me,' said Walter, in breathless explanation.

'Has he?' replied the widow lady. 'Then p'raps you'll give him Mrs MacStinger's respects, and say that the next time he lowers himself and his lodgings by talking out of the winder she'll thank him to come down and open the door too.' Mrs MacStinger spoke loud, and listened for any observations that might be offered from the first floor.

'I'll mention it,' said Walter, 'if you'll have the goodness to let me in, Ma'am.'

For he was repelled by a wooden fortification extending across the doorway, and put there to prevent the little MacStingers in their moments of recreation from tumbling down the steps.

'A boy that can knock my door down,' said Mrs MacStinger, contemptuously, 'can get over that, I should hope!' But Walter, taking this as a permission to enter, and getting over it, Mrs MacStinger immediately demanded whether an Englishwoman's house was her castle or not; and whether she was to be broke in upon by 'raff.' On these subjects her thirst for information was still very importunate, when Walter, having made his way up the little staircase through an artificial fog occasioned by the washing, which covered the banisters with a clammy perspiration, entered Captain Cuttle's room, and found that gentleman in ambush behind the door.

'Never owed her a penny, Wal'r,' said Captain Cuttle, in a low voice, and with visible marks of trepidation on his countenance. 'Done her a world of good turns, and the children too. Vixen at times, though. Whew!'

'I should go away, Captain Cuttle,' said Walter.

'Dursn't do it, Wal'r,' returned the Captain. 'She'd find me out, wherever I went. Sit down. How's Gills?'

The Captain was dining (in his hat) off cold loin of mutton, porter, and some smoking hot potatoes, which he had cooked himself, and took out of a little saucepan before the fire as he wanted them. He unscrewed his hook at dinner-time, and screwed a knife into its wooden socket instead, with which he had

already begun to peel one of these potatoes for Walter. His rooms were very small, and strongly impregnated with tobacco-smoke, but snug enough: everything being stowed away, as if there were an earthquake regularly every half-hour.

'How's Gills?' inquired the Captain.

Walter, who had by this time recovered his breath, and lost his spirits – or such temporary spirits as his rapid journey had given him – looked at his questioner for a moment, said 'Oh, Captain Cuttle!' and burst into tears.

No words can describe the Captain's consternation at this sight. Mrs MacStinger faded into nothing before it. He dropped the potato and the fork – and would have dropped the knife too if he could – and sat gazing at the boy, as if he expected to hear next moment that a gulf had opened in the City, which had swallowed up his old friend, coffee-coloured suit, buttons, chronometer, spectacles, and all.

But when Walter told him what was really the matter, Captain Cuttle, after a moment's reflection, started up into full activity. He emptied out of a little tin canister on the top shelf of the cupboard, his whole stock of ready money (amounting to thirteen pounds and half-a-crown), which he transferred to one of the pockets of his square blue coat; further enriched that repository with the contents of his plate chest, consisting of two withered atomies of tea-spoons, and an obsolete pair of knock-knee'd sugar-tongs; pulled up his immense double-cased silver watch from the depths in which it reposed, to assure himself that that

valuable was sound and whole; re-attached the hook to his right wrist; and seizing the stick covered over with knobs, bade Walter come along.

Remembering, however, in the midst of his virtuous excitement, that Mrs MacStinger might be lying in wait below, Captain Cuttle hesitated at last, not without glancing at the window, as if he had some thoughts of escaping by that unusual means of egress, rather than encounter his terrible enemy. He decided, however, in favour of stratagem.

'Wal'r,' said the Captain, with a timid wink, 'go afore, my lad. Sing out, "good-bye, Captain Cuttle," when you're in the passage, and shut the door. Then wait at the corner of the street 'till you see me.

These directions were not issued without a previous knowledge of the enemy's tactics, for when Walter got downstairs, Mrs MacStinger glided out of the little back kitchen, like an avenging spirit. But not gliding out upon the Captain, as she had expected, she merely made a further allusion to the knocker, and glided in again.

Some five minutes elapsed before Captain Cuttle could summon courage to attempt his escape; for Walter waited so long at the street corner, looking back at the house, before there were any symptoms of the hard glazed hat. At length the Captain burst out of the door with the suddenness of an explosion, and coming towards him at a great pace, and never once looking over his shoulder, pretended, as soon as they were well out of the street,

to whistle a tune.

‘Uncle much hove down, Wal’r?’ inquired the Captain, as they were walking along.

‘I am afraid so. If you had seen him this morning, you would never have forgotten it.’

‘Walk fast, Wal’r, my lad,’ returned the Captain, mending his pace; ‘and walk the same all the days of your life. Overhaul the catechism for that advice, and keep it!’

The Captain was too busy with his own thoughts of Solomon Gills, mingled perhaps with some reflections on his late escape from Mrs MacStinger, to offer any further quotations on the way for Walter’s moral improvement They interchanged no other word until they arrived at old Sol’s door, where the unfortunate wooden Midshipman, with his instrument at his eye, seemed to be surveying the whole horizon in search of some friend to help him out of his difficulty.

‘Gills!’ said the Captain, hurrying into the back parlour, and taking him by the hand quite tenderly. ‘Lay your head well to the wind, and we’ll fight through it. All you’ve got to do,’ said the Captain, with the solemnity of a man who was delivering himself of one of the most precious practical tenets ever discovered by human wisdom, ‘is to lay your head well to the wind, and we’ll fight through it!’

Old Sol returned the pressure of his hand, and thanked him.

Captain Cuttle, then, with a gravity suitable to the nature of the occasion, put down upon the table the two tea-spoons and the

sugar-tongs, the silver watch, and the ready money; and asked Mr Brogley, the broker, what the damage was.

'Come! What do you make of it?' said Captain Cuttle.

'Why, Lord help you!' returned the broker; 'you don't suppose that property's of any use, do you?'

'Why not?' inquired the Captain.

'Why? The amount's three hundred and seventy, odd,' replied the broker.

'Never mind,' returned the Captain, though he was evidently dismayed by the figures: 'all's fish that comes to your net, I suppose?'

'Certainly,' said Mr Brogley. 'But sprats ain't whales, you know.'

The philosophy of this observation seemed to strike the Captain. He ruminated for a minute; eyeing the broker, meanwhile, as a deep genius; and then called the Instrument-maker aside.

'Gills,' said Captain Cuttle, 'what's the bearings of this business? Who's the creditor?'

'Hush!' returned the old man. 'Come away. Don't speak before Wally. It's a matter of security for Wally's father – an old bond. I've paid a good deal of it, Ned, but the times are so bad with me that I can't do more just now. I've foreseen it, but I couldn't help it. Not a word before Wally, for all the world.'

'You've got some money, haven't you?' whispered the Captain.

'Yes, yes – oh yes – I've got some,' returned old Sol, first

putting his hands into his empty pockets, and then squeezing his Welsh wig between them, as if he thought he might wring some gold out of it; 'but I – the little I have got, isn't convertible, Ned; it can't be got at. I have been trying to do something with it for Wally, and I'm old fashioned, and behind the time. It's here and there, and – and, in short, it's as good as nowhere,' said the old man, looking in bewilderment about him.

He had so much the air of a half-witted person who had been hiding his money in a variety of places, and had forgotten where, that the Captain followed his eyes, not without a faint hope that he might remember some few hundred pounds concealed up the chimney, or down in the cellar. But Solomon Gills knew better than that.

'I'm behind the time altogether, my dear Ned,' said Sol, in resigned despair, 'a long way. It's no use my lagging on so far behind it. The stock had better be sold – it's worth more than this debt – and I had better go and die somewhere, on the balance. I haven't any energy left. I don't understand things. This had better be the end of it. Let 'em sell the stock and take him down,' said the old man, pointing feebly to the wooden Midshipman, 'and let us both be broken up together.'

'And what d'ye mean to do with Wal'r?' said the Captain. 'There, there! Sit ye down, Gills, sit ye down, and let me think o' this. If I warn't a man on a small annuity, that was large enough till to-day, I hadn't need to think of it. But you only lay your head well to the wind,' said the Captain, again administering that

unanswerable piece of consolation, 'and you're all right!'

Old Sol thanked him from his heart, and went and laid it against the back parlour fire-place instead.

Captain Cuttle walked up and down the shop for some time, cogitating profoundly, and bringing his bushy black eyebrows to bear so heavily on his nose, like clouds setting on a mountain, that Walter was afraid to offer any interruption to the current of his reflections. Mr Brogley, who was averse to being any constraint upon the party, and who had an ingenious cast of mind, went, softly whistling, among the stock; rattling weather-glasses, shaking compasses as if they were physic, catching up keys with loadstones, looking through telescopes, endeavouring to make himself acquainted with the use of the globes, setting parallel rulers astride on to his nose, and amusing himself with other philosophical transactions.

'Wal'r!' said the Captain at last. 'I've got it.'

'Have you, Captain Cuttle?' cried Walter, with great animation.

'Come this way, my lad,' said the Captain. 'The stock's the security. I'm another. Your governor's the man to advance money.'

'Mr Dombey!' faltered Walter.

The Captain nodded gravely. 'Look at him,' he said. 'Look at Gills. If they was to sell off these things now, he'd die of it. You know he would. We mustn't leave a stone unturned – and there's a stone for you.'

‘A stone! – Mr Dombey!’ faltered Walter.

‘You run round to the office, first of all, and see if he’s there,’ said Captain Cuttle, clapping him on the back. ‘Quick!’

Walter felt he must not dispute the command – a glance at his Uncle would have determined him if he had felt otherwise – and disappeared to execute it. He soon returned, out of breath, to say that Mr Dombey was not there. It was Saturday, and he had gone to Brighton.

‘I tell you what, Wal’r!’ said the Captain, who seemed to have prepared himself for this contingency in his absence. ‘We’ll go to Brighton. I’ll back you, my boy. I’ll back you, Wal’r. We’ll go to Brighton by the afternoon’s coach.’

If the application must be made to Mr Dombey at all, which was awful to think of, Walter felt that he would rather prefer it alone and unassisted, than backed by the personal influence of Captain Cuttle, to which he hardly thought Mr Dombey would attach much weight. But as the Captain appeared to be of quite another opinion, and was bent upon it, and as his friendship was too zealous and serious to be trifled with by one so much younger than himself, he forbore to hint the least objection. Cuttle, therefore, taking a hurried leave of Solomon Gills, and returning the ready money, the teaspoons, the sugar-tongs, and the silver watch, to his pocket – with a view, as Walter thought, with horror, to making a gorgeous impression on Mr Dombey – bore him off to the coach-office, without a minute’s delay, and repeatedly assured him, on the road, that he would stick by him

to the last.

CHAPTER 10. Containing the Sequel of the Midshipman's Disaster

Major Bagstock, after long and frequent observation of Paul, across Princess's Place, through his double-barrelled opera-glass; and after receiving many minute reports, daily, weekly, and monthly, on that subject, from the native who kept himself in constant communication with Miss Tox's maid for that purpose; came to the conclusion that Dombey, Sir, was a man to be known, and that J. B. was the boy to make his acquaintance.

Miss Tox, however, maintaining her reserved behaviour, and frigidly declining to understand the Major whenever he called (which he often did) on any little fishing excursion connected with this project, the Major, in spite of his constitutional toughness and slyness, was fain to leave the accomplishment of his desire in some measure to chance, 'which,' as he was used to observe with chuckles at his club, 'has been fifty to one in favour of Joey B., Sir, ever since his elder brother died of Yellow Jack in the West Indies.'

It was some time coming to his aid in the present instance, but it befriended him at last. When the dark servant, with full particulars, reported Miss Tox absent on Brighton service, the Major was suddenly touched with affectionate reminiscences of his friend Bill Bitherstone of Bengal, who had written to ask him,

if he ever went that way, to bestow a call upon his only son. But when the same dark servant reported Paul at Mrs Pipchin's, and the Major, referring to the letter favoured by Master Bitherstone on his arrival in England – to which he had never had the least idea of paying any attention – saw the opening that presented itself, he was made so rabid by the gout, with which he happened to be then laid up, that he threw a footstool at the dark servant in return for his intelligence, and swore he would be the death of the rascal before he had done with him: which the dark servant was more than half disposed to believe.

At length the Major being released from his fit, went one Saturday growling down to Brighton, with the native behind him; apostrophizing Miss Tox all the way, and gloating over the prospect of carrying by storm the distinguished friend to whom she attached so much mystery, and for whom she had deserted him.

'Would you, Ma'am, would you!' said the Major, straining with vindictiveness, and swelling every already swollen vein in his head. 'Would you give Joey B. the go-by, Ma'am? Not yet, Ma'am, not yet! Damme, not yet, Sir. Joe is awake, Ma'am. Bagstock is alive, Sir. J. B. knows a move or two, Ma'am. Josh has his weather-eye open, Sir. You'll find him tough, Ma'am. Tough, Sir, tough is Joseph. Tough, and de-vilish sly!'

And very tough indeed Master Bitherstone found him, when he took that young gentleman out for a walk. But the Major, with his complexion like a Stilton cheese, and his eyes like a prawn's,

went roving about, perfectly indifferent to Master Bitherstone's amusement, and dragging Master Bitherstone along, while he looked about him high and low, for Mr Dombey and his children.

In good time the Major, previously instructed by Mrs Pipchin, spied out Paul and Florence, and bore down upon them; there being a stately gentleman (Mr Dombey, doubtless) in their company. Charging with Master Bitherstone into the very heart of the little squadron, it fell out, of course, that Master Bitherstone spoke to his fellow-sufferers. Upon that the Major stopped to notice and admire them; remembered with amazement that he had seen and spoken to them at his friend Miss Tox's in Princess's Place; opined that Paul was a devilish fine fellow, and his own little friend; inquired if he remembered Joey B. the Major; and finally, with a sudden recollection of the conventionalities of life, turned and apologised to Mr Dombey.

'But my little friend here, Sir,' said the Major, 'makes a boy of me again: An old soldier, Sir – Major Bagstock, at your service – is not ashamed to confess it.' Here the Major lifted his hat. 'Damme, Sir,' cried the Major with sudden warmth, 'I envy you.' Then he recollected himself, and added, 'Excuse my freedom.'

Mr Dombey begged he wouldn't mention it.

'An old campaigner, Sir,' said the Major, 'a smoke-dried, sun-burnt, used-up, invalided old dog of a Major, Sir, was not afraid of being condemned for his whim by a man like Mr Dombey. I have the honour of addressing Mr Dombey, I believe?'

'I am the present unworthy representative of that name,

Major,' returned Mr Dombey.

'By G – , Sir!' said the Major, 'it's a great name. It's a name, Sir,' said the Major firmly, as if he defied Mr Dombey to contradict him, and would feel it his painful duty to bully him if he did, 'that is known and honoured in the British possessions abroad. It is a name, Sir, that a man is proud to recognise. There is nothing adulatory in Joseph Bagstock, Sir. His Royal Highness the Duke of York observed on more than one occasion, "there is no adulation in Joey. He is a plain old soldier is Joe. He is tough to a fault is Joseph:" but it's a great name, Sir. By the Lord, it's a great name!' said the Major, solemnly.

'You are good enough to rate it higher than it deserves, perhaps, Major,' returned Mr Dombey.

'No, Sir,' said the Major, in a severe tone. No, Mr Dombey, let us understand each other. That is not the Bagstock vein, Sir. You don't know Joseph B. He is a blunt old blade is Josh. No flattery in him, Sir. Nothing like it.'

Mr Dombey inclined his head, and said he believed him to be in earnest, and that his high opinion was gratifying.

'My little friend here, Sir,' croaked the Major, looking as amiably as he could, on Paul, 'will certify for Joseph Bagstock that he is a thorough-going, down-right, plain-spoken, old Trump, Sir, and nothing more. That boy, Sir,' said the Major in a lower tone, 'will live in history. That boy, Sir, is not a common production. Take care of him, Mr Dombey.'

Mr Dombey seemed to intimate that he would endeavour to

do so.

'Here is a boy here, Sir,' pursued the Major, confidentially, and giving him a thrust with his cane. 'Son of Bitherstone of Bengal. Bill Bitherstone formerly of ours. That boy's father and myself, Sir, were sworn friends. Wherever you went, Sir, you heard of nothing but Bill Bitherstone and Joe Bagstock. Am I blind to that boy's defects? By no means. He's a fool, Sir.'

Mr Dombey glanced at the libelled Master Bitherstone, of whom he knew at least as much as the Major did, and said, in quite a complacent manner, 'Really?'

'That is what he is, sir,' said the Major. 'He's a fool. Joe Bagstock never minces matters. The son of my old friend Bill Bitherstone, of Bengal, is a born fool, Sir.' Here the Major laughed till he was almost black. 'My little friend is destined for a public school, I presume, Mr Dombey?' said the Major when he had recovered.

'I am not quite decided,' returned Mr Dombey. 'I think not. He is delicate.'

'If he's delicate, Sir,' said the Major, 'you are right. None but the tough fellows could live through it, Sir, at Sandhurst. We put each other to the torture there, Sir. We roasted the new fellows at a slow fire, and hung 'em out of a three pair of stairs window, with their heads downwards. Joseph Bagstock, Sir, was held out of the window by the heels of his boots, for thirteen minutes by the college clock.'

The Major might have appealed to his countenance in

corroboration of this story. It certainly looked as if he had hung out a little too long.

'But it made us what we were, Sir,' said the Major, settling his shirt frill. 'We were iron, Sir, and it forged us. Are you remaining here, Mr Dombey?'

'I generally come down once a week, Major,' returned that gentleman. 'I stay at the Bedford.'

'I shall have the honour of calling at the Bedford, Sir, if you'll permit me,' said the Major. 'Joey B., Sir, is not in general a calling man, but Mr Dombey's is not a common name. I am much indebted to my little friend, Sir, for the honour of this introduction.'

Mr Dombey made a very gracious reply; and Major Bagstock, having patted Paul on the head, and said of Florence that her eyes would play the Devil with the youngsters before long – 'and the oldsters too, Sir, if you come to that,' added the Major, chuckling very much – stirred up Master Bitherstone with his walking-stick, and departed with that young gentleman, at a kind of half-trot; rolling his head and coughing with great dignity, as he staggered away, with his legs very wide asunder.

In fulfilment of his promise, the Major afterwards called on Mr Dombey; and Mr Dombey, having referred to the army list, afterwards called on the Major. Then the Major called at Mr Dombey's house in town; and came down again, in the same coach as Mr Dombey. In short, Mr Dombey and the Major got on uncommonly well together, and uncommonly fast: and Mr

Dombey observed of the Major, to his sister, that besides being quite a military man he was really something more, as he had a very admirable idea of the importance of things unconnected with his own profession.

At length Mr Dombey, bringing down Miss Tox and Mrs Chick to see the children, and finding the Major again at Brighton, invited him to dinner at the Bedford, and complimented Miss Tox highly, beforehand, on her neighbour and acquaintance.

'My dearest Louisa,' said Miss Tox to Mrs Chick, when they were alone together, on the morning of the appointed day, 'if I should seem at all reserved to Major Bagstock, or under any constraint with him, promise me not to notice it.'

'My dear Lucretia,' returned Mrs Chick, 'what mystery is involved in this remarkable request? I must insist upon knowing.'

'Since you are resolved to extort a confession from me, Louisa,' said Miss Tox instantly, 'I have no alternative but to confide to you that the Major has been particular.'

'Particular!' repeated Mrs Chick.

'The Major has long been very particular indeed, my love, in his attentions,' said Miss Tox, 'occasionally they have been so very marked, that my position has been one of no common difficulty.'

'Is he in good circumstances?' inquired Mrs Chick.

'I have every reason to believe, my dear – indeed I may say I know,' returned Miss Tox, 'that he is wealthy. He is truly military,

and full of anecdote. I have been informed that his valour, when he was in active service, knew no bounds. I am told that he did all sorts of things in the Peninsula, with every description of fire-arm; and in the East and West Indies, my love, I really couldn't undertake to say what he did not do.'

'Very creditable to him indeed,' said Mrs Chick, 'extremely so; and you have given him no encouragement, my dear?'

'If I were to say, Louisa,' replied Miss Tox, with every demonstration of making an effort that rent her soul, 'that I never encouraged Major Bagstock slightly, I should not do justice to the friendship which exists between you and me. It is, perhaps, hardly in the nature of woman to receive such attentions as the Major once lavished upon myself without betraying some sense of obligation. But that is past – long past. Between the Major and me there is now a yawning chasm, and I will not feign to give encouragement, Louisa, where I cannot give my heart. My affections,' said Miss Tox – 'but, Louisa, this is madness!' and departed from the room.

All this Mrs Chick communicated to her brother before dinner: and it by no means indisposed Mr Dombey to receive the Major with unwonted cordiality. The Major, for his part, was in a state of plethoric satisfaction that knew no bounds: and he coughed, and choked, and chuckled, and gasped, and swelled, until the waiters seemed positively afraid of him.

'Your family monopolises Joe's light, Sir,' said the Major, when he had saluted Miss Tox. 'Joe lives in darkness. Princess's

Place is changed into Kamschatka in the winter time. There is no ray of sun, Sir, for Joey B., now.'

'Miss Tox is good enough to take a great deal of interest in Paul, Major,' returned Mr Dombey on behalf of that blushing virgin.

'Damme Sir,' said the Major, 'I'm jealous of my little friend. I'm pining away Sir. The Bagstock breed is degenerating in the forsaken person of old Joe.' And the Major, becoming bluer and bluer and puffing his cheeks further and further over the stiff ridge of his tight cravat, stared at Miss Tox, until his eyes seemed as if he were at that moment being overdone before the slow fire at the military college.

Notwithstanding the palpitation of the heart which these allusions occasioned her, they were anything but disagreeable to Miss Tox, as they enabled her to be extremely interesting, and to manifest an occasional incoherence and distraction which she was not at all unwilling to display. The Major gave her abundant opportunities of exhibiting this emotion: being profuse in his complaints, at dinner, of her desertion of him and Princess's Place: and as he appeared to derive great enjoyment from making them, they all got on very well.

None the worse on account of the Major taking charge of the whole conversation, and showing as great an appetite in that respect as in regard of the various dainties on the table, among which he may be almost said to have wallowed: greatly to the aggravation of his inflammatory tendencies. Mr Dombey's

habitual silence and reserve yielding readily to this usurpation, the Major felt that he was coming out and shining: and in the flow of spirits thus engendered, rang such an infinite number of new changes on his own name that he quite astonished himself. In a word, they were all very well pleased. The Major was considered to possess an inexhaustible fund of conversation; and when he took a late farewell, after a long rubber, Mr Dombey again complimented the blushing Miss Tox on her neighbour and acquaintance.

But all the way home to his own hotel, the Major incessantly said to himself, and of himself, 'Sly, Sir – sly, Sir – de-vil-ish sly!' And when he got there, sat down in a chair, and fell into a silent fit of laughter, with which he was sometimes seized, and which was always particularly awful. It held him so long on this occasion that the dark servant, who stood watching him at a distance, but dared not for his life approach, twice or thrice gave him over for lost. His whole form, but especially his face and head, dilated beyond all former experience; and presented to the dark man's view, nothing but a heaving mass of indigo. At length he burst into a violent paroxysm of coughing, and when that was a little better burst into such ejaculations as the following:

'Would you, Ma'am, would you? Mrs Dombey, eh, Ma'am? I think not, Ma'am. Not while Joe B. can put a spoke in your wheel, Ma'am. J. B.'s even with you now, Ma'am. He isn't altogether bowled out, yet, Sir, isn't Bagstock. She's deep, Sir, deep, but Josh is deeper. Wide awake is old Joe – broad awake, and staring,

Sir!' There was no doubt of this last assertion being true, and to a very fearful extent; as it continued to be during the greater part of that night, which the Major chiefly passed in similar exclamations, diversified with fits of coughing and choking that startled the whole house.

It was on the day after this occasion (being Sunday) when, as Mr Dombey, Mrs Chick, and Miss Tox were sitting at breakfast, still eulogising the Major, Florence came running in: her face suffused with a bright colour, and her eyes sparkling joyfully: and cried,

'Papa! Papa! Here's Walter! and he won't come in.'

'Who?' cried Mr Dombey. 'What does she mean? What is this?'

'Walter, Papa!' said Florence timidly; sensible of having approached the presence with too much familiarity. 'Who found me when I was lost.'

'Does she mean young Gay, Louisa?' inquired Mr Dombey, knitting his brows. 'Really, this child's manners have become very boisterous. She cannot mean young Gay, I think. See what it is, will you?'

Mrs Chick hurried into the passage, and returned with the information that it was young Gay, accompanied by a very strange-looking person; and that young Gay said he would not take the liberty of coming in, hearing Mr Dombey was at breakfast, but would wait until Mr Dombey should signify that he might approach.

‘Tell the boy to come in now,’ said Mr Dombey. ‘Now, Gay, what is the matter? Who sent you down here? Was there nobody else to come?’

‘I beg your pardon, Sir,’ returned Walter. ‘I have not been sent. I have been so bold as to come on my own account, which I hope you’ll pardon when I mention the cause.

But Mr Dombey, without attending to what he said, was looking impatiently on either side of him (as if he were a pillar in his way) at some object behind.

‘What’s that?’ said Mr Dombey. ‘Who is that? I think you have made some mistake in the door, Sir.’

‘Oh, I’m very sorry to intrude with anyone, Sir,’ cried Walter, hastily: ‘but this is – this is Captain Cuttle, Sir.’

‘Wal’r, my lad,’ observed the Captain in a deep voice: ‘stand by!’

At the same time the Captain, coming a little further in, brought out his wide suit of blue, his conspicuous shirt-collar, and his knobby nose in full relief, and stood bowing to Mr Dombey, and waving his hook politely to the ladies, with the hard glazed hat in his one hand, and a red equator round his head which it had newly imprinted there.

Mr Dombey regarded this phenomenon with amazement and indignation, and seemed by his looks to appeal to Mrs Chick and Miss Tox against it. Little Paul, who had come in after Florence, backed towards Miss Tox as the Captain waved his hook, and stood on the defensive.

‘Now, Gay,’ said Mr Dombey. ‘What have you got to say to me?’

Again the Captain observed, as a general opening of the conversation that could not fail to propitiate all parties, ‘Wal’r, standby!’

‘I am afraid, Sir,’ began Walter, trembling, and looking down at the ground, ‘that I take a very great liberty in coming – indeed, I am sure I do. I should hardly have had the courage to ask to see you, Sir, even after coming down, I am afraid, if I had not overtaken Miss Dombey, and – ’

‘Well!’ said Mr Dombey, following his eyes as he glanced at the attentive Florence, and frowning unconsciously as she encouraged him with a smile. ‘Go on, if you please.’

‘Ay, ay,’ observed the Captain, considering it incumbent on him, as a point of good breeding, to support Mr Dombey. ‘Well said! Go on, Wal’r.’

Captain Cuttle ought to have been withered by the look which Mr Dombey bestowed upon him in acknowledgment of his patronage. But quite innocent of this, he closed one eye in reply, and gave Mr Dombey to understand, by certain significant motions of his hook, that Walter was a little bashful at first, and might be expected to come out shortly.

‘It is entirely a private and personal matter, that has brought me here, Sir,’ continued Walter, faltering, ‘and Captain Cuttle – ’

‘Here!’ interposed the Captain, as an assurance that he was at hand, and might be relied upon.

‘Who is a very old friend of my poor Uncle’s, and a most excellent man, Sir,’ pursued Walter, raising his eyes with a look of entreaty in the Captain’s behalf, ‘was so good as to offer to come with me, which I could hardly refuse.’

‘No, no, no;’ observed the Captain complacently. ‘Of course not. No call for refusing. Go on, Wal’r.’

‘And therefore, Sir,’ said Walter, venturing to meet Mr Dombey’s eye, and proceeding with better courage in the very desperation of the case, now that there was no avoiding it, ‘therefore I have come, with him, Sir, to say that my poor old Uncle is in very great affliction and distress. That, through the gradual loss of his business, and not being able to make a payment, the apprehension of which has weighed very heavily upon his mind, months and months, as indeed I know, Sir, he has an execution in his house, and is in danger of losing all he has, and breaking his heart. And that if you would, in your kindness, and in your old knowledge of him as a respectable man, do anything to help him out of his difficulty, Sir, we never could thank you enough for it.’

Walter’s eyes filled with tears as he spoke; and so did those of Florence. Her father saw them glistening, though he appeared to look at Walter only.

‘It is a very large sum, Sir,’ said Walter. ‘More than three hundred pounds. My Uncle is quite beaten down by his misfortune, it lies so heavy on him; and is quite unable to do anything for his own relief. He doesn’t even know yet, that I have

come to speak to you. You would wish me to say, Sir,' added Walter, after a moment's hesitation, 'exactly what it is I want. I really don't know, Sir. There is my Uncle's stock, on which I believe I may say, confidently, there are no other demands, and there is Captain Cuttle, who would wish to be security too. I – I hardly like to mention,' said Walter, 'such earnings as mine; but if you would allow them – accumulate – payment – advance – Uncle – frugal, honourable, old man.' Walter trailed off, through these broken sentences, into silence: and stood with downcast head, before his employer.

Considering this a favourable moment for the display of the valuables, Captain Cuttle advanced to the table; and clearing a space among the breakfast-cups at Mr Dombey's elbow, produced the silver watch, the ready money, the teaspoons, and the sugar-tongs; and piling them up into a heap that they might look as precious as possible, delivered himself of these words:

'Half a loaf's better than no bread, and the same remark holds good with crumbs. There's a few. Annuity of one hundred pound premium also ready to be made over. If there is a man chock full of science in the world, it's old Sol Gills. If there is a lad of promise – one flowing,' added the Captain, in one of his happy quotations, 'with milk and honey – it's his nevy!'

The Captain then withdrew to his former place, where he stood arranging his scattered locks with the air of a man who had given the finishing touch to a difficult performance.

When Walter ceased to speak, Mr Dombey's eyes were

attracted to little Paul, who, seeing his sister hanging down her head and silently weeping in her commiseration for the distress she had heard described, went over to her, and tried to comfort her: looking at Walter and his father as he did so, with a very expressive face. After the momentary distraction of Captain Cuttle's address, which he regarded with lofty indifference, Mr Dombey again turned his eyes upon his son, and sat steadily regarding the child, for some moments, in silence.

'What was this debt contracted for?' asked Mr Dombey, at length. 'Who is the creditor?'

'He don't know,' replied the Captain, putting his hand on Walter's shoulder. 'I do. It came of helping a man that's dead now, and that's cost my friend Gills many a hundred pound already. More particulars in private, if agreeable.'

'People who have enough to do to hold their own way,' said Mr Dombey, unobservant of the Captain's mysterious signs behind Walter, and still looking at his son, 'had better be content with their own obligations and difficulties, and not increase them by engaging for other men. It is an act of dishonesty and presumption, too,' said Mr Dombey, sternly; 'great presumption; for the wealthy could do no more. Paul, come here!'

The child obeyed: and Mr Dombey took him on his knee.

'If you had money now – ' said Mr Dombey. 'Look at me!'

Paul, whose eyes had wandered to his sister, and to Walter, looked his father in the face.

'If you had money now,' said Mr Dombey; 'as much money as

young Gay has talked about; what would you do?'

'Give it to his old Uncle,' returned Paul.

'Lend it to his old Uncle, eh?' retorted Mr Dombey. 'Well! When you are old enough, you know, you will share my money, and we shall use it together.'

'Dombey and Son,' interrupted Paul, who had been tutored early in the phrase.

'Dombey and Son,' repeated his father. 'Would you like to begin to be Dombey and Son, now, and lend this money to young Gay's Uncle?'

'Oh! if you please, Papa!' said Paul: 'and so would Florence.'

'Girls,' said Mr Dombey, 'have nothing to do with Dombey and Son. Would you like it?'

'Yes, Papa, yes!'

'Then you shall do it,' returned his father. 'And you see, Paul,' he added, dropping his voice, 'how powerful money is, and how anxious people are to get it. Young Gay comes all this way to beg for money, and you, who are so grand and great, having got it, are going to let him have it, as a great favour and obligation.'

Paul turned up the old face for a moment, in which there was a sharp understanding of the reference conveyed in these words: but it was a young and childish face immediately afterwards, when he slipped down from his father's knee, and ran to tell Florence not to cry any more, for he was going to let young Gay have the money.

Mr Dombey then turned to a side-table, and wrote a note

and sealed it. During the interval, Paul and Florence whispered to Walter, and Captain Cuttle beamed on the three, with such aspiring and ineffably presumptuous thoughts as Mr Dombey never could have believed in. The note being finished, Mr Dombey turned round to his former place, and held it out to Walter.

'Give that,' he said, 'the first thing to-morrow morning, to Mr Carker. He will immediately take care that one of my people releases your Uncle from his present position, by paying the amount at issue; and that such arrangements are made for its repayment as may be consistent with your Uncle's circumstances. You will consider that this is done for you by Master Paul.'

Walter, in the emotion of holding in his hand the means of releasing his good Uncle from his trouble, would have endeavoured to express something of his gratitude and joy. But Mr Dombey stopped him short.

'You will consider that it is done,' he repeated, 'by Master Paul. I have explained that to him, and he understands it. I wish no more to be said.'

As he motioned towards the door, Walter could only bow his head and retire. Miss Tox, seeing that the Captain appeared about to do the same, interposed.

'My dear Sir,' she said, addressing Mr Dombey, at whose munificence both she and Mrs Chick were shedding tears copiously; 'I think you have overlooked something. Pardon me, Mr Dombey, I think, in the nobility of your character, and its

exalted scope, you have omitted a matter of detail.'

'Indeed, Miss Tox!' said Mr Dombey.

'The gentleman with the – Instrument,' pursued Miss Tox, glancing at Captain Cuttle, 'has left upon the table, at your elbow – '

'Good Heaven!' said Mr Dombey, sweeping the Captain's property from him, as if it were so much crumb indeed. 'Take these things away. I am obliged to you, Miss Tox; it is like your usual discretion. Have the goodness to take these things away, Sir!'

Captain Cuttle felt he had no alternative but to comply. But he was so much struck by the magnanimity of Mr Dombey, in refusing treasures lying heaped up to his hand, that when he had deposited the teaspoons and sugar-tongs in one pocket, and the ready money in another, and had lowered the great watch down slowly into its proper vault, he could not refrain from seizing that gentleman's right hand in his own solitary left, and while he held it open with his powerful fingers, bringing the hook down upon its palm in a transport of admiration. At this touch of warm feeling and cold iron, Mr Dombey shivered all over.

Captain Cuttle then kissed his hook to the ladies several times, with great elegance and gallantry; and having taken a particular leave of Paul and Florence, accompanied Walter out of the room. Florence was running after them in the earnestness of her heart, to send some message to old Sol, when Mr Dombey called her back, and bade her stay where she was.

‘Will you never be a Dombey, my dear child!’ said Mrs Chick, with pathetic reproachfulness.

‘Dear aunt,’ said Florence. ‘Don’t be angry with me. I am so thankful to Papa!’

She would have run and thrown her arms about his neck if she had dared; but as she did not dare, she glanced with thankful eyes towards him, as he sat musing; sometimes bestowing an uneasy glance on her, but, for the most part, watching Paul, who walked about the room with the new-blown dignity of having let young Gay have the money.

And young Gay – Walter – what of him?

He was overjoyed to purge the old man’s hearth from bailiffs and brokers, and to hurry back to his Uncle with the good tidings. He was overjoyed to have it all arranged and settled next day before noon; and to sit down at evening in the little back parlour with old Sol and Captain Cuttle; and to see the Instrument-maker already reviving, and hopeful for the future, and feeling that the wooden Midshipman was his own again. But without the least impeachment of his gratitude to Mr Dombey, it must be confessed that Walter was humbled and cast down. It is when our budding hopes are nipped beyond recovery by some rough wind, that we are the most disposed to picture to ourselves what flowers they might have borne, if they had flourished; and now, when Walter found himself cut off from that great Dombey height, by the depth of a new and terrible tumble, and felt that all his old wild fancies had been scattered to the winds in the fall, he began

to suspect that they might have led him on to harmless visions of aspiring to Florence in the remote distance of time.

The Captain viewed the subject in quite a different light. He appeared to entertain a belief that the interview at which he had assisted was so very satisfactory and encouraging, as to be only a step or two removed from a regular betrothal of Florence to Walter; and that the late transaction had immensely forwarded, if not thoroughly established, the Whittingtonian hopes. Stimulated by this conviction, and by the improvement in the spirits of his old friend, and by his own consequent gaiety, he even attempted, in favouring them with the ballad of 'Lovely Peg' for the third time in one evening, to make an extemporaneous substitution of the name 'Florence;' but finding this difficult, on account of the word Peg invariably rhyming to leg (in which personal beauty the original was described as having excelled all competitors), he hit upon the happy thought of changing it to Fle-e-eg; which he accordingly did, with an archness almost supernatural, and a voice quite vociferous, notwithstanding that the time was close at hand when he must seek the abode of the dreadful Mrs MacStinger.

That same evening the Major was diffuse at his club, on the subject of his friend Dombey in the City. 'Damme, Sir,' said the Major, 'he's a prince, is my friend Dombey in the City. I tell you what, Sir. If you had a few more men among you like old Joe Bagstock and my friend Dombey in the City, Sir, you'd do!'

CHAPTER 11. Paul's Introduction to a New Scene

Mrs Pipchin's constitution was made of such hard metal, in spite of its liability to the fleshly weaknesses of standing in need of repose after chops, and of requiring to be coaxed to sleep by the soporific agency of sweet-breads, that it utterly set at naught the predictions of Mrs Wickam, and showed no symptoms of decline. Yet, as Paul's rapt interest in the old lady continued unbated, Mrs Wickam would not budge an inch from the position she had taken up. Fortifying and entrenching herself on the strong ground of her Uncle's Betsey Jane, she advised Miss Berry, as a friend, to prepare herself for the worst; and forewarned her that her aunt might, at any time, be expected to go off suddenly, like a powder-mill.

'I hope, Miss Berry,' Mrs Wickam would observe, 'that you'll come into whatever little property there may be to leave. You deserve it, I am sure, for yours is a trying life. Though there don't seem much worth coming into – you'll excuse my being so open – in this dismal den.'

Poor Berry took it all in good part, and drudged and slaved away as usual; perfectly convinced that Mrs Pipchin was one of the most meritorious persons in the world, and making every day innumerable sacrifices of herself upon the altar of that noble

old woman. But all these immolations of Berry were somehow carried to the credit of Mrs Pipchin by Mrs Pipchin's friends and admirers; and were made to harmonise with, and carry out, that melancholy fact of the deceased Mr Pipchin having broken his heart in the Peruvian mines.

For example, there was an honest grocer and general dealer in the retail line of business, between whom and Mrs Pipchin there was a small memorandum book, with a greasy red cover, perpetually in question, and concerning which divers secret councils and conferences were continually being held between the parties to that register, on the mat in the passage, and with closed doors in the parlour. Nor were there wanting dark hints from Master Bitherstone (whose temper had been made revengeful by the solar heats of India acting on his blood), of balances unsettled, and of a failure, on one occasion within his memory, in the supply of moist sugar at tea-time. This grocer being a bachelor and not a man who looked upon the surface for beauty, had once made honourable offers for the hand of Berry, which Mrs Pipchin had, with contumely and scorn, rejected. Everybody said how laudable this was in Mrs Pipchin, relict of a man who had died of the Peruvian mines; and what a staunch, high, independent spirit the old lady had. But nobody said anything about poor Berry, who cried for six weeks (being soundly rated by her good aunt all the time), and lapsed into a state of hopeless spinsterhood.

'Berry's very fond of you, ain't she?' Paul once asked Mrs

Pipchin when they were sitting by the fire with the cat.

'Yes,' said Mrs Pipchin.

'Why?' asked Paul.

'Why!' returned the disconcerted old lady. 'How can you ask such things, Sir! why are you fond of your sister Florence?'

'Because she's very good,' said Paul. 'There's nobody like Florence.'

'Well!' retorted Mrs Pipchin, shortly, 'and there's nobody like me, I suppose.'

'Ain't there really though?' asked Paul, leaning forward in his chair, and looking at her very hard.

'No,' said the old lady.

'I am glad of that,' observed Paul, rubbing his hands thoughtfully. 'That's a very good thing.'

Mrs Pipchin didn't dare to ask him why, lest she should receive some perfectly annihilating answer. But as a compensation to her wounded feelings, she harassed Master Bitherstone to that extent until bed-time, that he began that very night to make arrangements for an overland return to India, by secreting from his supper a quarter of a round of bread and a fragment of moist Dutch cheese, as the beginning of a stock of provision to support him on the voyage.

Mrs Pipchin had kept watch and ward over little Paul and his sister for nearly twelve months. They had been home twice, but only for a few days; and had been constant in their weekly visits to Mr Dombey at the hotel. By little and little Paul had grown

stronger, and had become able to dispense with his carriage; though he still looked thin and delicate; and still remained the same old, quiet, dreamy child that he had been when first consigned to Mrs Pipchin's care. One Saturday afternoon, at dusk, great consternation was occasioned in the Castle by the unlooked-for announcement of Mr Dombey as a visitor to Mrs Pipchin. The population of the parlour was immediately swept upstairs as on the wings of a whirlwind, and after much slamming of bedroom doors, and trampling overhead, and some knocking about of Master Bitherstone by Mrs Pipchin, as a relief to the perturbation of her spirits, the black bombazeen garments of the worthy old lady darkened the audience-chamber where Mr Dombey was contemplating the vacant arm-chair of his son and heir.

'Mrs Pipchin,' said Mr Dombey, 'How do you do?'

'Thank you, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin, 'I am pretty well, considering.'

Mrs Pipchin always used that form of words. It meant, considering her virtues, sacrifices, and so forth.

'I can't expect, Sir, to be very well,' said Mrs Pipchin, taking a chair and fetching her breath; 'but such health as I have, I am grateful for.'

Mr Dombey inclined his head with the satisfied air of a patron, who felt that this was the sort of thing for which he paid so much a quarter. After a moment's silence he went on to say:

'Mrs Pipchin, I have taken the liberty of calling, to consult

you in reference to my son. I have had it in my mind to do so for some time past; but have deferred it from time to time, in order that his health might be thoroughly re-established. You have no misgivings on that subject, Mrs Pipchin?'

'Brighton has proved very beneficial, Sir,' returned Mrs Pipchin. 'Very beneficial, indeed.'

'I purpose,' said Mr Dombey, 'his remaining at Brighton.'

Mrs Pipchin rubbed her hands, and bent her grey eyes on the fire.

'But,' pursued Mr Dombey, stretching out his forefinger, 'but possibly that he should now make a change, and lead a different kind of life here. In short, Mrs Pipchin, that is the object of my visit. My son is getting on, Mrs Pipchin. Really, he is getting on.'

There was something melancholy in the triumphant air with which Mr Dombey said this. It showed how long Paul's childish life had been to him, and how his hopes were set upon a later stage of his existence. Pity may appear a strange word to connect with anyone so haughty and so cold, and yet he seemed a worthy subject for it at that moment.

'Six years old!' said Mr Dombey, settling his neckcloth – perhaps to hide an irrepressible smile that rather seemed to strike upon the surface of his face and glance away, as finding no resting-place, than to play there for an instant. 'Dear me, six will be changed to sixteen, before we have time to look about us.'

'Ten years,' croaked the unsympathetic Pipchin, with a frosty glistening of her hard grey eye, and a dreary shaking of her bent

head, 'is a long time.'

'It depends on circumstances, returned Mr Dombey; 'at all events, Mrs Pipchin, my son is six years old, and there is no doubt, I fear, that in his studies he is behind many children of his age – or his youth,' said Mr Dombey, quickly answering what he mistrusted was a shrewd twinkle of the frosty eye, 'his youth is a more appropriate expression. Now, Mrs Pipchin, instead of being behind his peers, my son ought to be before them; far before them. There is an eminence ready for him to mount upon. There is nothing of chance or doubt in the course before my son. His way in life was clear and prepared, and marked out before he existed. The education of such a young gentleman must not be delayed. It must not be left imperfect. It must be very steadily and seriously undertaken, Mrs Pipchin.'

'Well, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin, 'I can say nothing to the contrary.'

'I was quite sure, Mrs Pipchin,' returned Mr Dombey, approvingly, 'that a person of your good sense could not, and would not.'

'There is a great deal of nonsense – and worse – talked about young people not being pressed too hard at first, and being tempted on, and all the rest of it, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin, impatiently rubbing her hooked nose. 'It never was thought of in my time, and it has no business to be thought of now. My opinion is "keep 'em at it".'

'My good madam,' returned Mr Dombey, 'you have not

acquired your reputation undeservedly; and I beg you to believe, Mrs Pipchin, that I am more than satisfied with your excellent system of management, and shall have the greatest pleasure in commending it whenever my poor commendation – ' Mr Dombey's loftiness when he affected to disparage his own importance, passed all bounds – 'can be of any service. I have been thinking of Doctor Blimber's, Mrs Pipchin.'

'My neighbour, Sir?' said Mrs Pipchin. 'I believe the Doctor's is an excellent establishment. I've heard that it's very strictly conducted, and there is nothing but learning going on from morning to night.'

'And it's very expensive,' added Mr Dombey.

'And it's very expensive, Sir,' returned Mrs Pipchin, catching at the fact, as if in omitting that, she had omitted one of its leading merits.

'I have had some communication with the Doctor, Mrs Pipchin,' said Mr Dombey, hitching his chair anxiously a little nearer to the fire, 'and he does not consider Paul at all too young for his purpose. He mentioned several instances of boys in Greek at about the same age. If I have any little uneasiness in my own mind, Mrs Pipchin, on the subject of this change, it is not on that head. My son not having known a mother has gradually concentrated much – too much – of his childish affection on his sister. Whether their separation – ' Mr Dombey said no more, but sat silent.

'Hoity-toity!' exclaimed Mrs Pipchin, shaking out her black

bombazeen skirts, and plucking up all the ogress within her. 'If she don't like it, Mr Dombey, she must be taught to lump it.' The good lady apologised immediately afterwards for using so common a figure of speech, but said (and truly) that that was the way she reasoned with 'em.

Mr Dombey waited until Mrs Pipchin had done bridling and shaking her head, and frowning down a legion of Bitherstones and Pankeys; and then said quietly, but correctively, 'He, my good madam, he.'

Mrs Pipchin's system would have applied very much the same mode of cure to any uneasiness on the part of Paul, too; but as the hard grey eye was sharp enough to see that the recipe, however Mr Dombey might admit its efficacy in the case of the daughter, was not a sovereign remedy for the son, she argued the point; and contended that change, and new society, and the different form of life he would lead at Doctor Blimber's, and the studies he would have to master, would very soon prove sufficient alienations. As this chimed in with Mr Dombey's own hope and belief, it gave that gentleman a still higher opinion of Mrs Pipchin's understanding; and as Mrs Pipchin, at the same time, bewailed the loss of her dear little friend (which was not an overwhelming shock to her, as she had long expected it, and had not looked, in the beginning, for his remaining with her longer than three months), he formed an equally good opinion of Mrs Pipchin's disinterestedness. It was plain that he had given the subject anxious consideration, for he had formed a plan, which

he announced to the ogress, of sending Paul to the Doctor's as a weekly boarder for the first half year, during which time Florence would remain at the Castle, that she might receive her brother there, on Saturdays. This would wean him by degrees, Mr Dombey said; possibly with a recollection of his not having been weaned by degrees on a former occasion.

Mr Dombey finished the interview by expressing his hope that Mrs Pipchin would still remain in office as general superintendent and overseer of his son, pending his studies at Brighton; and having kissed Paul, and shaken hands with Florence, and beheld Master Bitherstone in his collar of state, and made Miss Pankey cry by patting her on the head (in which region she was uncommonly tender, on account of a habit Mrs Pipchin had of sounding it with her knuckles, like a cask), he withdrew to his hotel and dinner: resolved that Paul, now that he was getting so old and well, should begin a vigorous course of education forthwith, to qualify him for the position in which he was to shine; and that Doctor Blimber should take him in hand immediately.

Whenever a young gentleman was taken in hand by Doctor Blimber, he might consider himself sure of a pretty tight squeeze. The Doctor only undertook the charge of ten young gentlemen, but he had, always ready, a supply of learning for a hundred, on the lowest estimate; and it was at once the business and delight of his life to gorge the unhappy ten with it.

In fact, Doctor Blimber's establishment was a great hot-house,

in which there was a forcing apparatus incessantly at work. All the boys blew before their time. Mental green-peas were produced at Christmas, and intellectual asparagus all the year round. Mathematical gooseberries (very sour ones too) were common at untimely seasons, and from mere sprouts of bushes, under Doctor Blimber's cultivation. Every description of Greek and Latin vegetable was got off the driest twigs of boys, under the frostiest circumstances. Nature was of no consequence at all. No matter what a young gentleman was intended to bear, Doctor Blimber made him bear to pattern, somehow or other.

This was all very pleasant and ingenious, but the system of forcing was attended with its usual disadvantages. There was not the right taste about the premature productions, and they didn't keep well. Moreover, one young gentleman, with a swollen nose and an excessively large head (the oldest of the ten who had 'gone through' everything), suddenly left off blowing one day, and remained in the establishment a mere stalk. And people did say that the Doctor had rather overdone it with young Toots, and that when he began to have whiskers he left off having brains.

There young Toots was, at any rate; possessed of the gruffest of voices and the shrillest of minds; sticking ornamental pins into his shirt, and keeping a ring in his waistcoat pocket to put on his little finger by stealth, when the pupils went out walking; constantly falling in love by sight with nurserymaids, who had no idea of his existence; and looking at the gas-lighted world over the little iron bars in the left-hand corner window of the

front three pairs of stairs, after bed-time, like a greatly overgrown cherub who had sat up aloft much too long.

The Doctor was a portly gentleman in a suit of black, with strings at his knees, and stockings below them. He had a bald head, highly polished; a deep voice; and a chin so very double, that it was a wonder how he ever managed to shave into the creases. He had likewise a pair of little eyes that were always half shut up, and a mouth that was always half expanded into a grin, as if he had, that moment, posed a boy, and were waiting to convict him from his own lips. Insomuch, that when the Doctor put his right hand into the breast of his coat, and with his other hand behind him, and a scarcely perceptible wag of his head, made the commonest observation to a nervous stranger, it was like a sentiment from the sphynx, and settled his business.

The Doctor's was a mighty fine house, fronting the sea. Not a joyful style of house within, but quite the contrary. Sad-coloured curtains, whose proportions were spare and lean, hid themselves despondently behind the windows. The tables and chairs were put away in rows, like figures in a sum; fires were so rarely lighted in the rooms of ceremony, that they felt like wells, and a visitor represented the bucket; the dining-room seemed the last place in the world where any eating or drinking was likely to occur; there was no sound through all the house but the ticking of a great clock in the hall, which made itself audible in the very garrets; and sometimes a dull cooing of young gentlemen at their lessons, like the murmurings of an assemblage of melancholy pigeons.

Miss Blimber, too, although a slim and graceful maid, did no soft violence to the gravity of the house. There was no light nonsense about Miss Blimber. She kept her hair short and crisp, and wore spectacles. She was dry and sandy with working in the graves of deceased languages. None of your live languages for Miss Blimber. They must be dead – stone dead – and then Miss Blimber dug them up like a Ghoul.

Mrs Blimber, her Mama, was not learned herself, but she pretended to be, and that did quite as well. She said at evening parties, that if she could have known Cicero, she thought she could have died contented. It was the steady joy of her life to see the Doctor's young gentlemen go out walking, unlike all other young gentlemen, in the largest possible shirt-collars, and the stiffest possible cravats. It was so classical, she said.

As to Mr Feeder, B.A., Doctor Blimber's assistant, he was a kind of human barrel-organ, with a little list of tunes at which he was continually working, over and over again, without any variation. He might have been fitted up with a change of barrels, perhaps, in early life, if his destiny had been favourable; but it had not been; and he had only one, with which, in a monotonous round, it was his occupation to bewilder the young ideas of Doctor Blimber's young gentlemen. The young gentlemen were prematurely full of carking anxieties. They knew no rest from the pursuit of stony-hearted verbs, savage noun-substantives, inflexible syntactic passages, and ghosts of exercises that appeared to them in their dreams. Under the

forcing system, a young gentleman usually took leave of his spirits in three weeks. He had all the cares of the world on his head in three months. He conceived bitter sentiments against his parents or guardians in four; he was an old misanthrope, in five; envied Curtius that blessed refuge in the earth, in six; and at the end of the first twelvemonth had arrived at the conclusion, from which he never afterwards departed, that all the fancies of the poets, and lessons of the sages, were a mere collection of words and grammar, and had no other meaning in the world.

But he went on blow, blow, blowing, in the Doctor's hothouse, all the time; and the Doctor's glory and reputation were great, when he took his wintry growth home to his relations and friends.

Upon the Doctor's door-steps one day, Paul stood with a fluttering heart, and with his small right hand in his father's. His other hand was locked in that of Florence. How tight the tiny pressure of that one; and how loose and cold the other!

Mrs Pipchin hovered behind the victim, with her sable plumage and her hooked beak, like a bird of ill-omen. She was out of breath – for Mr Dombey, full of great thoughts, had walked fast – and she croaked hoarsely as she waited for the opening of the door.

'Now, Paul,' said Mr Dombey, exultingly. 'This is the way indeed to be Dombey and Son, and have money. You are almost a man already.'

'Almost,' returned the child.

Even his childish agitation could not master the sly and quaint

yet touching look, with which he accompanied the reply.

It brought a vague expression of dissatisfaction into Mr Dombey's face; but the door being opened, it was quickly gone.

'Doctor Blimber is at home, I believe?' said Mr Dombey.

The man said yes; and as they passed in, looked at Paul as if he were a little mouse, and the house were a trap. He was a weak-eyed young man, with the first faint streaks or early dawn of a grin on his countenance. It was mere imbecility; but Mrs Pipchin took it into her head that it was impudence, and made a snap at him directly.

'How dare you laugh behind the gentleman's back?' said Mrs Pipchin. 'And what do you take me for?'

'I ain't a laughing at nobody, and I'm sure I don't take you for nothing, Ma'am,' returned the young man, in consternation.

'A pack of idle dogs!' said Mrs Pipchin, 'only fit to be turnspits. Go and tell your master that Mr Dombey's here, or it'll be worse for you!'

The weak-eyed young man went, very meekly, to discharge himself of this commission; and soon came back to invite them to the Doctor's study.

'You're laughing again, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin, when it came to her turn, bringing up the rear, to pass him in the hall.

'I ain't,' returned the young man, grievously oppressed. 'I never see such a thing as this!'

'What is the matter, Mrs Pipchin?' said Mr Dombey, looking round. 'Softly! Pray!'

Mrs Pipchin, in her deference, merely muttered at the young man as she passed on, and said, 'Oh! he was a precious fellow' – leaving the young man, who was all meekness and incapacity, affected even to tears by the incident. But Mrs Pipchin had a way of falling foul of all meek people; and her friends said who could wonder at it, after the Peruvian mines!

The Doctor was sitting in his portentous study, with a globe at each knee, books all round him, Homer over the door, and Minerva on the mantel-shelf. 'And how do you do, Sir?' he said to Mr Dombey, 'and how is my little friend?' Grave as an organ was the Doctor's speech; and when he ceased, the great clock in the hall seemed (to Paul at least) to take him up, and to go on saying, 'how, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?' over and over and over again.

The little friend being something too small to be seen at all from where the Doctor sat, over the books on his table, the Doctor made several futile attempts to get a view of him round the legs; which Mr Dombey perceiving, relieved the Doctor from his embarrassment by taking Paul up in his arms, and sitting him on another little table, over against the Doctor, in the middle of the room.

'Ha!' said the Doctor, leaning back in his chair with his hand in his breast. 'Now I see my little friend. How do you do, my little friend?'

The clock in the hall wouldn't subscribe to this alteration in the form of words, but continued to repeat how, is, my, lit, tle,

friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?'

'Very well, I thank you, Sir,' returned Paul, answering the clock quite as much as the Doctor.

'Ha!' said Doctor Blimber. 'Shall we make a man of him?'

'Do you hear, Paul?' added Mr Dombey; Paul being silent.

'Shall we make a man of him?' repeated the Doctor.

'I had rather be a child,' replied Paul.

'Indeed!' said the Doctor. 'Why?'

The child sat on the table looking at him, with a curious expression of suppressed emotion in his face, and beating one hand proudly on his knee as if he had the rising tears beneath it, and crushed them. But his other hand strayed a little way the while, a little farther – farther from him yet – until it lighted on the neck of Florence. 'This is why,' it seemed to say, and then the steady look was broken up and gone; the working lip was loosened; and the tears came streaming forth.

'Mrs Pipchin,' said his father, in a querulous manner, 'I am really very sorry to see this.'

'Come away from him, do, Miss Dombey,' quoth the matron.

'Never mind,' said the Doctor, blandly nodding his head, to keep Mrs Pipchin back. 'Never mind; we shall substitute new cares and new impressions, Mr Dombey, very shortly. You would still wish my little friend to acquire – '

'Everything, if you please, Doctor,' returned Mr Dombey, firmly.

'Yes,' said the Doctor, who, with his half-shut eyes, and his

usual smile, seemed to survey Paul with the sort of interest that might attach to some choice little animal he was going to stuff. 'Yes, exactly. Ha! We shall impart a great variety of information to our little friend, and bring him quickly forward, I daresay. I daresay. Quite a virgin soil, I believe you said, Mr Dombey?'

'Except some ordinary preparation at home, and from this lady,' replied Mr Dombey, introducing Mrs Pipchin, who instantly communicated a rigidity to her whole muscular system, and snorted defiance beforehand, in case the Doctor should disparage her; 'except so far, Paul has, as yet, applied himself to no studies at all.'

Doctor Blimber inclined his head, in gentle tolerance of such insignificant poaching as Mrs Pipchin's, and said he was glad to hear it. It was much more satisfactory, he observed, rubbing his hands, to begin at the foundation. And again he leered at Paul, as if he would have liked to tackle him with the Greek alphabet, on the spot.

'That circumstance, indeed, Doctor Blimber,' pursued Mr Dombey, glancing at his little son, 'and the interview I have already had the pleasure of holding with you, renders any further explanation, and consequently, any further intrusion on your valuable time, so unnecessary, that – '

'Now, Miss Dombey!' said the acid Pipchin.

'Permit me,' said the Doctor, 'one moment. Allow me to present Mrs Blimber and my daughter; who will be associated with the domestic life of our young Pilgrim to Parnassus

Mrs Blimber,' for the lady, who had perhaps been in waiting, opportunely entered, followed by her daughter, that fair Sexton in spectacles, 'Mr Dombey. My daughter Cornelia, Mr Dombey. Mr Dombey, my love,' pursued the Doctor, turning to his wife, 'is so confiding as to – do you see our little friend?'

Mrs Blimber, in an excess of politeness, of which Mr Dombey was the object, apparently did not, for she was backing against the little friend, and very much endangering his position on the table. But, on this hint, she turned to admire his classical and intellectual lineaments, and turning again to Mr Dombey, said, with a sigh, that she envied his dear son.

'Like a bee, Sir,' said Mrs Blimber, with uplifted eyes, 'about to plunge into a garden of the choicest flowers, and sip the sweets for the first time Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Terence, Plautus, Cicero. What a world of honey have we here. It may appear remarkable, Mr Dombey, in one who is a wife – the wife of such a husband – '

'Hush, hush,' said Doctor Blimber. 'Fie for shame.'

'Mr Dombey will forgive the partiality of a wife,' said Mrs Blimber, with an engaging smile.

Mr Dombey answered 'Not at all:' applying those words, it is to be presumed, to the partiality, and not to the forgiveness.

'And it may seem remarkable in one who is a mother also,' resumed Mrs Blimber.

'And such a mother,' observed Mr Dombey, bowing with some confused idea of being complimentary to Cornelia.

'But really,' pursued Mrs Blimber, 'I think if I could have

known Cicero, and been his friend, and talked with him in his retirement at Tusculum (beau-ti-ful Tusculum!), I could have died contented.'

A learned enthusiasm is so very contagious, that Mr Dombey half believed this was exactly his case; and even Mrs Pipchin, who was not, as we have seen, of an accommodating disposition generally, gave utterance to a little sound between a groan and a sigh, as if she would have said that nobody but Cicero could have proved a lasting consolation under that failure of the Peruvian Mines, but that he indeed would have been a very Davy-lamp of refuge.

Cornelia looked at Mr Dombey through her spectacles, as if she would have liked to crack a few quotations with him from the authority in question. But this design, if she entertained it, was frustrated by a knock at the room-door.

'Who is that?' said the Doctor. 'Oh! Come in, Toots; come in. Mr Dombey, Sir.' Toots bowed. 'Quite a coincidence!' said Doctor Blimber. 'Here we have the beginning and the end. Alpha and Omega. Our head boy, Mr Dombey.'

The Doctor might have called him their head and shoulders boy, for he was at least that much taller than any of the rest. He blushed very much at finding himself among strangers, and chuckled aloud.

'An addition to our little Portico, Toots,' said the Doctor; 'Mr Dombey's son.'

Young Toots blushed again; and finding, from a solemn

silence which prevailed, that he was expected to say something, said to Paul, 'How are you?' in a voice so deep, and a manner so sheepish, that if a lamb had roared it couldn't have been more surprising.

'Ask Mr Feeder, if you please, Toots,' said the Doctor, 'to prepare a few introductory volumes for Mr Dombey's son, and to allot him a convenient seat for study. My dear, I believe Mr Dombey has not seen the dormitories.'

'If Mr Dombey will walk upstairs,' said Mrs Blimber, 'I shall be more than proud to show him the dominions of the drowsy god.'

With that, Mrs Blimber, who was a lady of great suavity, and a wiry figure, and who wore a cap composed of sky-blue materials, proceeded upstairs with Mr Dombey and Cornelia; Mrs Pipchin following, and looking out sharp for her enemy the footman.

While they were gone, Paul sat upon the table, holding Florence by the hand, and glancing timidly from the Doctor round and round the room, while the Doctor, leaning back in his chair, with his hand in his breast as usual, held a book from him at arm's length, and read. There was something very awful in this manner of reading. It was such a determined, unimpassioned, inflexible, cold-blooded way of going to work. It left the Doctor's countenance exposed to view; and when the Doctor smiled suspiciously at his author, or knit his brows, or shook his head and made wry faces at him, as much as to say, 'Don't tell me, Sir; I know better,' it was terrific.

Toots, too, had no business to be outside the door, ostentatiously examining the wheels in his watch, and counting his half-crowns. But that didn't last long; for Doctor Blimber, happening to change the position of his tight plump legs, as if he were going to get up, Toots swiftly vanished, and appeared no more.

Mr Dombey and his conductress were soon heard coming downstairs again, talking all the way; and presently they re-entered the Doctor's study.

'I hope, Mr Dombey,' said the Doctor, laying down his book, 'that the arrangements meet your approval.'

'They are excellent, Sir,' said Mr Dombey.

'Very fair, indeed,' said Mrs Pipchin, in a low voice; never disposed to give too much encouragement.

'Mrs Pipchin,' said Mr Dombey, wheeling round, 'will, with your permission, Doctor and Mrs Blimber, visit Paul now and then.'

'Whenever Mrs Pipchin pleases,' observed the Doctor.

'Always happy to see her,' said Mrs Blimber.

'I think,' said Mr Dombey, 'I have given all the trouble I need, and may take my leave. Paul, my child,' he went close to him, as he sat upon the table. 'Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, Papa.'

The limp and careless little hand that Mr Dombey took in his, was singularly out of keeping with the wistful face. But he had no part in its sorrowful expression. It was not addressed to him.

No, no. To Florence – all to Florence.

If Mr Dombey in his insolence of wealth, had ever made an enemy, hard to appease and cruelly vindictive in his hate, even such an enemy might have received the pang that wrung his proud heart then, as compensation for his injury.

He bent down, over his boy, and kissed him. If his sight were dimmed as he did so, by something that for a moment blurred the little face, and made it indistinct to him, his mental vision may have been, for that short time, the clearer perhaps.

'I shall see you soon, Paul. You are free on Saturdays and Sundays, you know.'

'Yes, Papa,' returned Paul: looking at his sister. 'On Saturdays and Sundays.'

'And you'll try and learn a great deal here, and be a clever man,' said Mr Dombey; 'won't you?'

'I'll try,' returned the child, wearily.

'And you'll soon be grown up now!' said Mr Dombey.

'Oh! very soon!' replied the child. Once more the old, old look passed rapidly across his features like a strange light. It fell on Mrs Pipchin, and extinguished itself in her black dress. That excellent ogress stepped forward to take leave and to bear off Florence, which she had long been thirsting to do. The move on her part roused Mr Dombey, whose eyes were fixed on Paul. After patting him on the head, and pressing his small hand again, he took leave of Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber, with his usual polite frigidity, and walked out of the

study.

Despite his entreaty that they would not think of stirring, Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber all pressed forward to attend him to the hall; and thus Mrs Pipchin got into a state of entanglement with Miss Blimber and the Doctor, and was crowded out of the study before she could clutch Florence. To which happy accident Paul stood afterwards indebted for the dear remembrance, that Florence ran back to throw her arms round his neck, and that hers was the last face in the doorway: turned towards him with a smile of encouragement, the brighter for the tears through which it beamed.

It made his childish bosom heave and swell when it was gone; and sent the globes, the books, blind Homer and Minerva, swimming round the room. But they stopped, all of a sudden; and then he heard the loud clock in the hall still gravely inquiring 'how, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?' as it had done before.

He sat, with folded hands, upon his pedestal, silently listening. But he might have answered 'weary, weary! very lonely, very sad!' And there, with an aching void in his young heart, and all outside so cold, and bare, and strange, Paul sat as if he had taken life unfurnished, and the upholsterer were never coming.

CHAPTER 12. Paul's Education

After the lapse of some minutes, which appeared an immense time to little Paul Dombey on the table, Doctor Blimber came back. The Doctor's walk was stately, and calculated to impress the juvenile mind with solemn feelings. It was a sort of march; but when the Doctor put out his right foot, he gravely turned upon his axis, with a semi-circular sweep towards the left; and when he put out his left foot, he turned in the same manner towards the right. So that he seemed, at every stride he took, to look about him as though he were saying, 'Can anybody have the goodness to indicate any subject, in any direction, on which I am uninformed? I rather think not.'

Mrs Blimber and Miss Blimber came back in the Doctor's company; and the Doctor, lifting his new pupil off the table, delivered him over to Miss Blimber.

'Cornelia,' said the Doctor, 'Dombey will be your charge at first. Bring him on, Cornelia, bring him on.'

Miss Blimber received her young ward from the Doctor's hands; and Paul, feeling that the spectacles were surveying him, cast down his eyes.

'How old are you, Dombey?' said Miss Blimber.

'Six,' answered Paul, wondering, as he stole a glance at the young lady, why her hair didn't grow long like Florence's, and why she was like a boy.

‘How much do you know of your Latin Grammar, Dombey?’ said Miss Blimber.

‘None of it,’ answered Paul. Feeling that the answer was a shock to Miss Blimber’s sensibility, he looked up at the three faces that were looking down at him, and said:

‘I haven’t been well. I have been a weak child. I couldn’t learn a Latin Grammar when I was out, every day, with old Glubb. I wish you’d tell old Glubb to come and see me, if you please.’

‘What a dreadfully low name’ said Mrs Blimber. ‘Unclassical to a degree! Who is the monster, child?’

‘What monster?’ inquired Paul.

‘Glubb,’ said Mrs Blimber, with a great disrelish.

‘He’s no more a monster than you are,’ returned Paul.

‘What!’ cried the Doctor, in a terrible voice. ‘Ay, ay, ay? Aha! What’s that?’

Paul was dreadfully frightened; but still he made a stand for the absent Glubb, though he did it trembling.

‘He’s a very nice old man, Ma’am,’ he said. ‘He used to draw my couch. He knows all about the deep sea, and the fish that are in it, and the great monsters that come and lie on rocks in the sun, and dive into the water again when they’re startled, blowing and splashing so, that they can be heard for miles. There are some creatures, said Paul, warming with his subject, ‘I don’t know how many yards long, and I forget their names, but Florence knows, that pretend to be in distress; and when a man goes near them, out of compassion, they open their great jaws, and attack him. But

all he has got to do,' said Paul, boldly tendering this information to the very Doctor himself, 'is to keep on turning as he runs away, and then, as they turn slowly, because they are so long, and can't bend, he's sure to beat them. And though old Glubb don't know why the sea should make me think of my Mama that's dead, or what it is that it is always saying – always saying! he knows a great deal about it. And I wish,' the child concluded, with a sudden falling of his countenance, and failing in his animation, as he looked like one forlorn, upon the three strange faces, 'that you'd let old Glubb come here to see me, for I know him very well, and he knows me.'

'Ha!' said the Doctor, shaking his head; 'this is bad, but study will do much.'

Mrs Blimber opined, with something like a shiver, that he was an unaccountable child; and, allowing for the difference of visage, looked at him pretty much as Mrs Pipchin had been used to do.

'Take him round the house, Cornelia,' said the Doctor, 'and familiarise him with his new sphere. Go with that young lady, Dombey.'

Dombey obeyed; giving his hand to the abstruse Cornelia, and looking at her sideways, with timid curiosity, as they went away together. For her spectacles, by reason of the glistening of the glasses, made her so mysterious, that he didn't know where she was looking, and was not indeed quite sure that she had any eyes at all behind them.

Cornelia took him first to the schoolroom, which was situated at the back of the hall, and was approached through two baize doors, which deadened and muffled the young gentlemen's voices. Here, there were eight young gentlemen in various stages of mental prostration, all very hard at work, and very grave indeed. Toots, as an old hand, had a desk to himself in one corner: and a magnificent man, of immense age, he looked, in Paul's young eyes, behind it.

Mr Feeder, B.A., who sat at another little desk, had his Virgil stop on, and was slowly grinding that tune to four young gentlemen. Of the remaining four, two, who grasped their foreheads convulsively, were engaged in solving mathematical problems; one with his face like a dirty window, from much crying, was endeavouring to flounder through a hopeless number of lines before dinner; and one sat looking at his task in stony stupefaction and despair – which it seemed had been his condition ever since breakfast time.

The appearance of a new boy did not create the sensation that might have been expected. Mr Feeder, B.A. (who was in the habit of shaving his head for coolness, and had nothing but little bristles on it), gave him a bony hand, and told him he was glad to see him – which Paul would have been very glad to have told him, if he could have done so with the least sincerity. Then Paul, instructed by Cornelia, shook hands with the four young gentlemen at Mr Feeder's desk; then with the two young gentlemen at work on the problems, who were very feverish;

then with the young gentleman at work against time, who was very inky; and lastly with the young gentleman in a state of stupefaction, who was flabby and quite cold.

Paul having been already introduced to Toots, that pupil merely chuckled and breathed hard, as his custom was, and pursued the occupation in which he was engaged. It was not a severe one; for on account of his having 'gone through' so much (in more senses than one), and also of his having, as before hinted, left off blowing in his prime, Toots now had licence to pursue his own course of study: which was chiefly to write long letters to himself from persons of distinction, adds 'P. Toots, Esquire, Brighton, Sussex,' and to preserve them in his desk with great care.

These ceremonies passed, Cornelia led Paul upstairs to the top of the house; which was rather a slow journey, on account of Paul being obliged to land both feet on every stair, before he mounted another. But they reached their journey's end at last; and there, in a front room, looking over the wild sea, Cornelia showed him a nice little bed with white hangings, close to the window, on which there was already beautifully written on a card in round text – down strokes very thick, and up strokes very fine – DOMBEY; while two other little bedsteads in the same room were announced, through like means, as respectively appertaining unto BRIGGS and TOZER.

Just as they got downstairs again into the hall, Paul saw the weak-eyed young man who had given that mortal offence to Mrs

Pipchin, suddenly seize a very large drumstick, and fly at a gong that was hanging up, as if he had gone mad, or wanted vengeance. Instead of receiving warning, however, or being instantly taken into custody, the young man left off unchecked, after having made a dreadful noise. Then Cornelia Blimber said to Dombey that dinner would be ready in a quarter of an hour, and perhaps he had better go into the schoolroom among his 'friends.'

So Dombey, deferentially passing the great clock which was still as anxious as ever to know how he found himself, opened the schoolroom door a very little way, and strayed in like a lost boy: shutting it after him with some difficulty. His friends were all dispersed about the room except the stony friend, who remained immoveable. Mr Feeder was stretching himself in his grey gown, as if, regardless of expense, he were resolved to pull the sleeves off.

'Heigh ho hum!' cried Mr Feeder, shaking himself like a cart-horse. 'Oh dear me, dear me! Ya-a-a-ah!'

Paul was quite alarmed by Mr Feeder's yawning; it was done on such a great scale, and he was so terribly in earnest. All the boys too (Toots excepted) seemed knocked up, and were getting ready for dinner – some newly tying their neckcloths, which were very stiff indeed; and others washing their hands or brushing their hair, in an adjoining ante-chamber – as if they didn't think they should enjoy it at all.

Young Toots who was ready beforehand, and had therefore nothing to do, and had leisure to bestow upon Paul, said, with

heavy good nature:

'Sit down, Dombey.'

'Thank you, Sir,' said Paul.

His endeavouring to hoist himself on to a very high window-seat, and his slipping down again, appeared to prepare Toots's mind for the reception of a discovery.

'You're a very small chap;' said Mr Toots.

'Yes, Sir, I'm small,' returned Paul. 'Thank you, Sir.'

For Toots had lifted him into the seat, and done it kindly too.

'Who's your tailor?' inquired Toots, after looking at him for some moments.

'It's a woman that has made my clothes as yet,' said Paul. 'My sister's dressmaker.'

'My tailor's Burgess and Co.,' said Toots. 'Fash'nable. But very dear.'

Paul had wit enough to shake his head, as if he would have said it was easy to see that; and indeed he thought so.

'Your father's regularly rich, ain't he?' inquired Mr Toots.

'Yes, Sir,' said Paul. 'He's Dombey and Son.'

'And which?' demanded Toots.

'And Son, Sir,' replied Paul.

Mr Toots made one or two attempts, in a low voice, to fix the Firm in his mind; but not quite succeeding, said he would get Paul to mention the name again to-morrow morning, as it was rather important. And indeed he purposed nothing less than writing himself a private and confidential letter from Dombey

and Son immediately.

By this time the other pupils (always excepting the stony boy) gathered round. They were polite, but pale; and spoke low; and they were so depressed in their spirits, that in comparison with the general tone of that company, Master Bitherstone was a perfect Miller, or complete Jest Book.' And yet he had a sense of injury upon him, too, had Bitherstone.

'You sleep in my room, don't you?' asked a solemn young gentleman, whose shirt-collar curled up the lobes of his ears.

'Master Briggs?' inquired Paul.

'Tozer,' said the young gentleman.

Paul answered yes; and Tozer pointing out the stony pupil, said that was Briggs. Paul had already felt certain that it must be either Briggs or Tozer, though he didn't know why.

'Is yours a strong constitution?' inquired Tozer.

Paul said he thought not. Tozer replied that he thought not also, judging from Paul's looks, and that it was a pity, for it need be. He then asked Paul if he were going to begin with Cornelia; and on Paul saying 'yes,' all the young gentlemen (Briggs excepted) gave a low groan.

It was drowned in the tintinnabulation of the gong, which sounding again with great fury, there was a general move towards the dining-room; still excepting Briggs the stony boy, who remained where he was, and as he was; and on its way to whom Paul presently encountered a round of bread, genteelly served on a plate and napkin, and with a silver fork lying crosswise on

the top of it. Doctor Blimber was already in his place in the dining-room, at the top of the table, with Miss Blimber and Mrs Blimber on either side of him. Mr Feeder in a black coat was at the bottom. Paul's chair was next to Miss Blimber; but it being found, when he sat in it, that his eyebrows were not much above the level of the table-cloth, some books were brought in from the Doctor's study, on which he was elevated, and on which he always sat from that time – carrying them in and out himself on after occasions, like a little elephant and castle.

Grace having been said by the Doctor, dinner began. There was some nice soup; also roast meat, boiled meat, vegetables, pie, and cheese. Every young gentleman had a massive silver fork, and a napkin; and all the arrangements were stately and handsome. In particular, there was a butler in a blue coat and bright buttons, who gave quite a winey flavour to the table beer; he poured it out so superbly.

Nobody spoke, unless spoken to, except Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber, who conversed occasionally. Whenever a young gentleman was not actually engaged with his knife and fork or spoon, his eye, with an irresistible attraction, sought the eye of Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, or Miss Blimber, and modestly rested there. Toots appeared to be the only exception to this rule. He sat next Mr Feeder on Paul's side of the table, and frequently looked behind and before the intervening boys to catch a glimpse of Paul.

Only once during dinner was there any conversation that

included the young gentlemen. It happened at the epoch of the cheese, when the Doctor, having taken a glass of port wine, and hemmed twice or thrice, said:

'It is remarkable, Mr Feeder, that the Romans – '

At the mention of this terrible people, their implacable enemies, every young gentleman fastened his gaze upon the Doctor, with an assumption of the deepest interest. One of the number who happened to be drinking, and who caught the Doctor's eye glaring at him through the side of his tumbler, left off so hastily that he was convulsed for some moments, and in the sequel ruined Doctor Blimber's point.

'It is remarkable, Mr Feeder,' said the Doctor, beginning again slowly, 'that the Romans, in those gorgeous and profuse entertainments of which we read in the days of the Emperors, when luxury had attained a height unknown before or since, and when whole provinces were ravaged to supply the splendid means of one Imperial Banquet – '

Here the offender, who had been swelling and straining, and waiting in vain for a full stop, broke out violently.

'Johnson,' said Mr Feeder, in a low reproachful voice, 'take some water.'

The Doctor, looking very stern, made a pause until the water was brought, and then resumed:

'And when, Mr Feeder – '

But Mr Feeder, who saw that Johnson must break out again, and who knew that the Doctor would never come to a period

before the young gentlemen until he had finished all he meant to say, couldn't keep his eye off Johnson; and thus was caught in the fact of not looking at the Doctor, who consequently stopped.

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' said Mr Feeder, reddening. 'I beg your pardon, Doctor Blimber.'

'And when,' said the Doctor, raising his voice, 'when, Sir, as we read, and have no reason to doubt – incredible as it may appear to the vulgar – of our time – the brother of Vitellius prepared for him a feast, in which were served, of fish, two thousand dishes – '

'Take some water, Johnson – dishes, Sir,' said Mr Feeder.

'Of various sorts of fowl, five thousand dishes.'

'Or try a crust of bread,' said Mr Feeder.

'And one dish,' pursued Doctor Blimber, raising his voice still higher as he looked all round the table, 'called, from its enormous dimensions, the Shield of Minerva, and made, among other costly ingredients, of the brains of pheasants – '

'Ow, ow, ow!' (from Johnson.)

'Woodcocks – '

'Ow, ow, ow!'

'The sounds of the fish called scari – '

'You'll burst some vessel in your head,' said Mr Feeder. 'You had better let it come.'

'And the spawn of the lamprey, brought from the Carpathian Sea,' pursued the Doctor, in his severest voice; 'when we read of costly entertainments such as these, and still remember, that we

have a Titus – ’

‘What would be your mother’s feelings if you died of apoplexy!’ said Mr Feeder.

‘A Domitian – ’

‘And you’re blue, you know,’ said Mr Feeder.

‘A Nero, a Tiberius, a Caligula, a Heliogabalus, and many more, pursued the Doctor; ‘it is, Mr Feeder – if you are doing me the honour to attend – remarkable; VERY remarkable, Sir – ’

But Johnson, unable to suppress it any longer, burst at that moment into such an overwhelming fit of coughing, that although both his immediate neighbours thumped him on the back, and Mr Feeder himself held a glass of water to his lips, and the butler walked him up and down several times between his own chair and the sideboard, like a sentry, it was a full five minutes before he was moderately composed. Then there was a profound silence.

‘Gentlemen,’ said Doctor Blimber, ‘rise for Grace! Cornelia, lift Dombey down’ – nothing of whom but his scalp was accordingly seen above the tablecloth. ‘Johnson will repeat to me tomorrow morning before breakfast, without book, and from the Greek Testament, the first chapter of the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Ephesians. We will resume our studies, Mr Feeder, in half-an-hour.’

The young gentlemen bowed and withdrew. Mr Feeder did likewise. During the half-hour, the young gentlemen, broken into pairs, loitered arm-in-arm up and down a small piece of ground behind the house, or endeavoured to kindle a spark of animation

in the breast of Briggs. But nothing happened so vulgar as play. Punctually at the appointed time, the gong was sounded, and the studies, under the joint auspices of Doctor Blimber and Mr Feeder, were resumed.

As the Olympic game of lounging up and down had been cut shorter than usual that day, on Johnson's account, they all went out for a walk before tea. Even Briggs (though he hadn't begun yet) partook of this dissipation; in the enjoyment of which he looked over the cliff two or three times darkly. Doctor Blimber accompanied them; and Paul had the honour of being taken in tow by the Doctor himself: a distinguished state of things, in which he looked very little and feeble.

Tea was served in a style no less polite than the dinner; and after tea, the young gentlemen rising and bowing as before, withdrew to fetch up the unfinished tasks of that day, or to get up the already looming tasks of to-morrow. In the meantime Mr Feeder withdrew to his own room; and Paul sat in a corner wondering whether Florence was thinking of him, and what they were all about at Mrs Pipchin's.

Mr Toots, who had been detained by an important letter from the Duke of Wellington, found Paul out after a time; and having looked at him for a long while, as before, inquired if he was fond of waistcoats.

Paul said 'Yes, Sir.'

'So am I,' said Toots.

No word more spoke Toots that night; but he stood looking at

Paul as if he liked him; and as there was company in that, and Paul was not inclined to talk, it answered his purpose better than conversation.

At eight o'clock or so, the gong sounded again for prayers in the dining-room, where the butler afterwards presided over a side-table, on which bread and cheese and beer were spread for such young gentlemen as desired to partake of those refreshments. The ceremonies concluded by the Doctor's saying, 'Gentlemen, we will resume our studies at seven to-morrow;' and then, for the first time, Paul saw Cornelia Blimber's eye, and saw that it was upon him. When the Doctor had said these words, 'Gentlemen, we will resume our studies at seven tomorrow,' the pupils bowed again, and went to bed.

In the confidence of their own room upstairs, Briggs said his head ached ready to split, and that he should wish himself dead if it wasn't for his mother, and a blackbird he had at home. Tozer didn't say much, but he sighed a good deal, and told Paul to look out, for his turn would come to-morrow. After uttering those prophetic words, he undressed himself moodily, and got into bed. Briggs was in his bed too, and Paul in his bed too, before the weak-eyed young man appeared to take away the candle, when he wished them good-night and pleasant dreams. But his benevolent wishes were in vain, as far as Briggs and Tozer were concerned; for Paul, who lay awake for a long while, and often woke afterwards, found that Briggs was ridden by his lesson as a nightmare: and that Tozer, whose mind was affected in his sleep

by similar causes, in a minor degree talked unknown tongues, or scraps of Greek and Latin – it was all one to Paul – which, in the silence of night, had an inexpressibly wicked and guilty effect.

Paul had sunk into a sweet sleep, and dreamed that he was walking hand in hand with Florence through beautiful gardens, when they came to a large sunflower which suddenly expanded itself into a gong, and began to sound. Opening his eyes, he found that it was a dark, windy morning, with a drizzling rain: and that the real gong was giving dreadful note of preparation, down in the hall.

So he got up directly, and found Briggs with hardly any eyes, for nightmare and grief had made his face puffy, putting his boots on: while Tozer stood shivering and rubbing his shoulders in a very bad humour. Poor Paul couldn't dress himself easily, not being used to it, and asked them if they would have the goodness to tie some strings for him; but as Briggs merely said 'Bother!' and Tozer, 'Oh yes!' he went down when he was otherwise ready, to the next storey, where he saw a pretty young woman in leather gloves, cleaning a stove. The young woman seemed surprised at his appearance, and asked him where his mother was. When Paul told her she was dead, she took her gloves off, and did what he wanted; and furthermore rubbed his hands to warm them; and gave him a kiss; and told him whenever he wanted anything of that sort – meaning in the dressing way – to ask for 'Melia; which Paul, thanking her very much, said he certainly would. He then proceeded softly on his journey downstairs, towards the room in

which the young gentlemen resumed their studies, when, passing by a door that stood ajar, a voice from within cried, 'Is that Dombey?' On Paul replying, 'Yes, Ma'am:' for he knew the voice to be Miss Blimber's: Miss Blimber said, 'Come in, Dombey.' And in he went.

Miss Blimber presented exactly the appearance she had presented yesterday, except that she wore a shawl. Her little light curls were as crisp as ever, and she had already her spectacles on, which made Paul wonder whether she went to bed in them. She had a cool little sitting-room of her own up there, with some books in it, and no fire But Miss Blimber was never cold, and never sleepy.

Now, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber, 'I am going out for a constitutional.'

Paul wondered what that was, and why she didn't send the footman out to get it in such unfavourable weather. But he made no observation on the subject: his attention being devoted to a little pile of new books, on which Miss Blimber appeared to have been recently engaged.

'These are yours, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber.

'All of 'em, Ma'am?' said Paul.

'Yes,' returned Miss Blimber; 'and Mr Feeder will look you out some more very soon, if you are as studious as I expect you will be, Dombey.'

'Thank you, Ma'am,' said Paul.

'I am going out for a constitutional,' resumed Miss Blimber;

‘and while I am gone, that is to say in the interval between this and breakfast, Dombey, I wish you to read over what I have marked in these books, and to tell me if you quite understand what you have got to learn. Don’t lose time, Dombey, for you have none to spare, but take them downstairs, and begin directly.’

‘Yes, Ma’am,’ answered Paul.

There were so many of them, that although Paul put one hand under the bottom book and his other hand and his chin on the top book, and hugged them all closely, the middle book slipped out before he reached the door, and then they all tumbled down on the floor. Miss Blimber said, ‘Oh, Dombey, Dombey, this is really very careless!’ and piled them up afresh for him; and this time, by dint of balancing them with great nicety, Paul got out of the room, and down a few stairs before two of them escaped again. But he held the rest so tight, that he only left one more on the first floor, and one in the passage; and when he had got the main body down into the schoolroom, he set off upstairs again to collect the stragglers. Having at last amassed the whole library, and climbed into his place, he fell to work, encouraged by a remark from Tozer to the effect that he ‘was in for it now;’ which was the only interruption he received till breakfast time. At that meal, for which he had no appetite, everything was quite as solemn and genteel as at the others; and when it was finished, he followed Miss Blimber upstairs.

‘Now, Dombey,’ said Miss Blimber. ‘How have you got on with those books?’

They comprised a little English, and a deal of Latin – names of things, declensions of articles and substantives, exercises thereon, and preliminary rules – a trifle of orthography, a glance at ancient history, a wink or two at modern ditto, a few tables, two or three weights and measures, and a little general information. When poor Paul had spelt out number two, he found he had no idea of number one; fragments whereof afterwards obtruded themselves into number three, which slided into number four, which grafted itself on to number two. So that whether twenty Romuluses made a Remus, or hic haec hoc was troy weight, or a verb always agreed with an ancient Briton, or three times four was Taurus a bull, were open questions with him.

'Oh, Dombey, Dombey!' said Miss Blimber, 'this is very shocking.'

'If you please,' said Paul, 'I think if I might sometimes talk a little to old Glubb, I should be able to do better.'

'Nonsense, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber. 'I couldn't hear of it. This is not the place for Glubbs of any kind. You must take the books down, I suppose, Dombey, one by one, and perfect yourself in the day's instalment of subject A, before you turn at all to subject B. I am sorry to say, Dombey, that your education appears to have been very much neglected.'

'So Papa says,' returned Paul; 'but I told you – I have been a weak child. Florence knows I have. So does Wickam.'

'Who is Wickam?' asked Miss Blimber.

'She has been my nurse,' Paul answered.

‘I must beg you not to mention Wickam to me, then,’ said Miss Blimber. ‘I couldn’t allow it’.

‘You asked me who she was,’ said Paul.

‘Very well,’ returned Miss Blimber; ‘but this is all very different indeed from anything of that sort, Dombey, and I couldn’t think of permitting it. As to having been weak, you must begin to be strong. And now take away the top book, if you please, Dombey, and return when you are master of the theme.’

Miss Blimber expressed her opinions on the subject of Paul’s uninstructed state with a gloomy delight, as if she had expected this result, and were glad to find that they must be in constant communication. Paul withdrew with the top task, as he was told, and laboured away at it, down below: sometimes remembering every word of it, and sometimes forgetting it all, and everything else besides: until at last he ventured upstairs again to repeat the lesson, when it was nearly all driven out of his head before he began, by Miss Blimber’s shutting up the book, and saying, ‘Go on, Dombey!’ a proceeding so suggestive of the knowledge inside of her, that Paul looked upon the young lady with consternation, as a kind of learned Guy Fawkes, or artificial Bogle, stuffed full of scholastic straw.

He acquitted himself very well, nevertheless; and Miss Blimber, commending him as giving promise of getting on fast, immediately provided him with subject B; from which he passed to C, and even D before dinner. It was hard work, resuming his studies, soon after dinner; and he felt giddy and confused and

drowsy and dull. But all the other young gentlemen had similar sensations, and were obliged to resume their studies too, if there were any comfort in that. It was a wonder that the great clock in the hall, instead of being constant to its first inquiry, never said, 'Gentlemen, we will now resume our studies,' for that phrase was often enough repeated in its neighbourhood. The studies went round like a mighty wheel, and the young gentlemen were always stretched upon it.

After tea there were exercises again, and preparations for next day by candlelight. And in due course there was bed; where, but for that resumption of the studies which took place in dreams, were rest and sweet forgetfulness.

Oh Saturdays! Oh happy Saturdays, when Florence always came at noon, and never would, in any weather, stay away, though Mrs Pipchin snarled and growled, and worried her bitterly. Those Saturdays were Sabbaths for at least two little Christians among all the Jews, and did the holy Sabbath work of strengthening and knitting up a brother's and a sister's love.

Not even Sunday nights – the heavy Sunday nights, whose shadow darkened the first waking burst of light on Sunday mornings – could mar those precious Saturdays. Whether it was the great sea-shore, where they sat, and strolled together; or whether it was only Mrs Pipchin's dull back room, in which she sang to him so softly, with his drowsy head upon her arm; Paul never cared. It was Florence. That was all he thought of. So, on Sunday nights, when the Doctor's dark door stood agape to

swallow him up for another week, the time was come for taking leave of Florence; no one else.

Mrs Wickam had been drafted home to the house in town, and Miss Nipper, now a smart young woman, had come down. To many a single combat with Mrs Pipchin, did Miss Nipper gallantly devote herself, and if ever Mrs Pipchin in all her life had found her match, she had found it now. Miss Nipper threw away the scabbard the first morning she arose in Mrs Pipchin's house. She asked and gave no quarter. She said it must be war, and war it was; and Mrs Pipchin lived from that time in the midst of surprises, harassings, and defiances, and skirmishing attacks that came bouncing in upon her from the passage, even in unguarded moments of chops, and carried desolation to her very toast.

Miss Nipper had returned one Sunday night with Florence, from walking back with Paul to the Doctor's, when Florence took from her bosom a little piece of paper, on which she had pencilled down some words.

'See here, Susan,' she said. 'These are the names of the little books that Paul brings home to do those long exercises with, when he is so tired. I copied them last night while he was writing.'

'Don't show 'em to me, Miss Floy, if you please,' returned Nipper, 'I'd as soon see Mrs Pipchin.'

'I want you to buy them for me, Susan, if you will, tomorrow morning. I have money enough,' said Florence.

'Why, goodness gracious me, Miss Floy,' returned Miss Nipper, 'how can you talk like that, when you have books upon

books already, and masterses and mississes a teaching of you everything continual, though my belief is that your Pa, Miss Dombey, never would have learnt you nothing, never would have thought of it, unless you'd asked him – when he couldn't well refuse; but giving consent when asked, and offering when unasked, Miss, is quite two things; I may not have my objections to a young man's keeping company with me, and when he puts the question, may say "yes," but that's not saying "would you be so kind as like me."'

'But you can buy me the books, Susan; and you will, when you know why I want them.'

'Well, Miss, and why do you want 'em?' replied Nipper; adding, in a lower voice, 'If it was to fling at Mrs Pipchin's head, I'd buy a cart-load.'

'Paul has a great deal too much to do, Susan,' said Florence, 'I am sure of it.'

'And well you may be, Miss,' returned her maid, 'and make your mind quite easy that the willing dear is worked and worked away. If those is Latin legs,' exclaimed Miss Nipper, with strong feeling – in allusion to Paul's; 'give me English ones.'

'I am afraid he feels lonely and lost at Doctor Blimber's, Susan,' pursued Florence, turning away her face.

'Ah,' said Miss Nipper, with great sharpness, 'Oh, them "Blimbers"'

'Don't blame anyone,' said Florence. 'It's a mistake.'

'I say nothing about blame, Miss,' cried Miss Nipper, 'for I

know that you object, but I may wish, Miss, that the family was set to work to make new roads, and that Miss Blimber went in front and had the pickaxe.'

After this speech, Miss Nipper, who was perfectly serious, wiped her eyes.

'I think I could perhaps give Paul some help, Susan, if I had these books,' said Florence, 'and make the coming week a little easier to him. At least I want to try. So buy them for me, dear, and I will never forget how kind it was of you to do it!'

It must have been a harder heart than Susan Nipper's that could have rejected the little purse Florence held out with these words, or the gentle look of entreaty with which she seconded her petition. Susan put the purse in her pocket without reply, and trotted out at once upon her errand.

The books were not easy to procure; and the answer at several shops was, either that they were just out of them, or that they never kept them, or that they had had a great many last month, or that they expected a great many next week But Susan was not easily baffled in such an enterprise; and having entrapped a white-haired youth, in a black calico apron, from a library where she was known, to accompany her in her quest, she led him such a life in going up and down, that he exerted himself to the utmost, if it were only to get rid of her; and finally enabled her to return home in triumph.

With these treasures then, after her own daily lessons were over, Florence sat down at night to track Paul's footsteps through

the thorny ways of learning; and being possessed of a naturally quick and sound capacity, and taught by that most wonderful of masters, love, it was not long before she gained upon Paul's heels, and caught and passed him.

Not a word of this was breathed to Mrs Pipchin: but many a night when they were all in bed, and when Miss Nipper, with her hair in papers and herself asleep in some uncomfortable attitude, reposed unconscious by her side; and when the chinking ashes in the grate were cold and grey; and when the candles were burnt down and guttering out; – Florence tried so hard to be a substitute for one small Dombey, that her fortitude and perseverance might have almost won her a free right to bear the name herself.

And high was her reward, when one Saturday evening, as little Paul was sitting down as usual to 'resume his studies,' she sat down by his side, and showed him all that was so rough, made smooth, and all that was so dark, made clear and plain, before him. It was nothing but a startled look in Paul's wan face – a flush – a smile – and then a close embrace – but God knows how her heart leapt up at this rich payment for her trouble.

'Oh, Floy!' cried her brother, 'how I love you! How I love you, Floy!'

'And I you, dear!'

'Oh! I am sure of that, Floy.'

He said no more about it, but all that evening sat close by her, very quiet; and in the night he called out from his little room within hers, three or four times, that he loved her.

Regularly, after that, Florence was prepared to sit down with Paul on Saturday night, and patiently assist him through so much as they could anticipate together of his next week's work. The cheering thought that he was labouring on where Florence had just toiled before him, would, of itself, have been a stimulant to Paul in the perpetual resumption of his studies; but coupled with the actual lightening of his load, consequent on this assistance, it saved him, possibly, from sinking underneath the burden which the fair Cornelia Blimber piled upon his back.

It was not that Miss Blimber meant to be too hard upon him, or that Doctor Blimber meant to bear too heavily on the young gentlemen in general. Cornelia merely held the faith in which she had been bred; and the Doctor, in some partial confusion of his ideas, regarded the young gentlemen as if they were all Doctors, and were born grown up. Comforted by the applause of the young gentlemen's nearest relations, and urged on by their blind vanity and ill-considered haste, it would have been strange if Doctor Blimber had discovered his mistake, or trimmed his swelling sails to any other tack.

Thus in the case of Paul. When Doctor Blimber said he made great progress and was naturally clever, Mr Dombey was more bent than ever on his being forced and crammed. In the case of Briggs, when Doctor Blimber reported that he did not make great progress yet, and was not naturally clever, Briggs senior was inexorable in the same purpose. In short, however high and false the temperature at which the Doctor kept his hothouse, the

owners of the plants were always ready to lend a helping hand at the bellows, and to stir the fire.

Such spirits as he had in the outset, Paul soon lost of course. But he retained all that was strange, and old, and thoughtful in his character: and under circumstances so favourable to the development of those tendencies, became even more strange, and old, and thoughtful, than before.

The only difference was, that he kept his character to himself. He grew more thoughtful and reserved, every day; and had no such curiosity in any living member of the Doctor's household, as he had had in Mrs Pipchin. He loved to be alone; and in those short intervals when he was not occupied with his books, liked nothing so well as wandering about the house by himself, or sitting on the stairs, listening to the great clock in the hall. He was intimate with all the paperhanging in the house; saw things that no one else saw in the patterns; found out miniature tigers and lions running up the bedroom walls, and squinting faces leering in the squares and diamonds of the floor-cloth.

The solitary child lived on, surrounded by this arabesque work of his musing fancy, and no one understood him. Mrs Blimber thought him 'odd,' and sometimes the servants said among themselves that little Dombey 'moped;' but that was all.

Unless young Toots had some idea on the subject, to the expression of which he was wholly unequal. Ideas, like ghosts (according to the common notion of ghosts), must be spoken to a little before they will explain themselves; and Toots had long left

off asking any questions of his own mind. Some mist there may have been, issuing from that leaden casket, his cranium, which, if it could have taken shape and form, would have become a genie; but it could not; and it only so far followed the example of the smoke in the Arabian story, as to roll out in a thick cloud, and there hang and hover. But it left a little figure visible upon a lonely shore, and Toots was always staring at it.

'How are you?' he would say to Paul, fifty times a day. 'Quite well, Sir, thank you,' Paul would answer. 'Shake hands,' would be Toots's next advance.

Which Paul, of course, would immediately do. Mr Toots generally said again, after a long interval of staring and hard breathing, 'How are you?' To which Paul again replied, 'Quite well, Sir, thank you.'

One evening Mr Toots was sitting at his desk, oppressed by correspondence, when a great purpose seemed to flash upon him. He laid down his pen, and went off to seek Paul, whom he found at last, after a long search, looking through the window of his little bedroom.

'I say!' cried Toots, speaking the moment he entered the room, lest he should forget it; 'what do you think about?'

'Oh! I think about a great many things,' replied Paul.

'Do you, though?' said Toots, appearing to consider that fact in itself surprising. 'If you had to die,' said Paul, looking up into his face – Mr Toots started, and seemed much disturbed.

'Don't you think you would rather die on a moonlight night,

when the sky was quite clear, and the wind blowing, as it did last night?'

Mr Toots said, looking doubtfully at Paul, and shaking his head, that he didn't know about that.

'Not blowing, at least,' said Paul, 'but sounding in the air like the sea sounds in the shells. It was a beautiful night. When I had listened to the water for a long time, I got up and looked out. There was a boat over there, in the full light of the moon; a boat with a sail.'

The child looked at him so steadfastly, and spoke so earnestly, that Mr Toots, feeling himself called upon to say something about this boat, said, 'Smugglers.' But with an impartial remembrance of there being two sides to every question, he added, 'or Preventive.'

'A boat with a sail,' repeated Paul, 'in the full light of the moon. The sail like an arm, all silver. It went away into the distance, and what do you think it seemed to do as it moved with the waves?'

'Pitch,' said Mr Toots.

'It seemed to beckon,' said the child, 'to beckon me to come! – There she is! There she is!'

Toots was almost beside himself with dismay at this sudden exclamation, after what had gone before, and cried 'Who?'

'My sister Florence!' cried Paul, 'looking up here, and waving her hand. She sees me – she sees me! Good-night, dear, good-night, good-night.'

His quick transition to a state of unbounded pleasure, as he

stood at his window, kissing and clapping his hands: and the way in which the light retreated from his features as she passed out of his view, and left a patient melancholy on the little face: were too remarkable wholly to escape even Toots's notice. Their interview being interrupted at this moment by a visit from Mrs Pipchin, who usually brought her black skirts to bear upon Paul just before dusk, once or twice a week, Toots had no opportunity of improving the occasion: but it left so marked an impression on his mind that he twice returned, after having exchanged the usual salutations, to ask Mrs Pipchin how she did. This the irascible old lady conceived to be a deeply devised and long-meditated insult, originating in the diabolical invention of the weak-eyed young man downstairs, against whom she accordingly lodged a formal complaint with Doctor Blimber that very night; who mentioned to the young man that if he ever did it again, he should be obliged to part with him.

The evenings being longer now, Paul stole up to his window every evening to look out for Florence. She always passed and repassed at a certain time, until she saw him; and their mutual recognition was a gleam of sunshine in Paul's daily life. Often after dark, one other figure walked alone before the Doctor's house. He rarely joined them on the Saturdays now. He could not bear it. He would rather come unrecognised, and look up at the windows where his son was qualifying for a man; and wait, and watch, and plan, and hope.

Oh! could he but have seen, or seen as others did, the slight

spare boy above, watching the waves and clouds at twilight, with his earnest eyes, and breasting the window of his solitary cage when birds flew by, as if he would have emulated them, and soared away!

CHAPTER 13. Shipping Intelligence and Office Business

Mr Dombey's offices were in a court where there was an old-established stall of choice fruit at the corner: where perambulating merchants, of both sexes, offered for sale at any time between the hours of ten and five, slippers, pocket-books, sponges, dogs' collars, and Windsor soap; and sometimes a pointer or an oil-painting.

The pointer always came that way, with a view to the Stock Exchange, where a sporting taste (originating generally in bets of new hats) is much in vogue. The other commodities were addressed to the general public; but they were never offered by the vendors to Mr Dombey. When he appeared, the dealers in those wares fell off respectfully. The principal slipper and dogs' collar man – who considered himself a public character, and whose portrait was screwed on to an artist's door in Cheapside – threw up his forefinger to the brim of his hat as Mr Dombey went by. The ticket-porter, if he were not absent on a job, always ran officiously before, to open Mr Dombey's office door as wide as possible, and hold it open, with his hat off, while he entered.

The clerks within were not a whit behind-hand in their demonstrations of respect. A solemn hush prevailed, as Mr Dombey passed through the outer office. The wit of the

Counting-House became in a moment as mute as the row of leathern fire-buckets hanging up behind him. Such vapid and flat daylight as filtered through the ground-glass windows and skylights, leaving a black sediment upon the panes, showed the books and papers, and the figures bending over them, enveloped in a studious gloom, and as much abstracted in appearance, from the world without, as if they were assembled at the bottom of the sea; while a mouldy little strong room in the obscure perspective, where a shaded lamp was always burning, might have represented the cavern of some ocean monster, looking on with a red eye at these mysteries of the deep.

When Perch the messenger, whose place was on a little bracket, like a timepiece, saw Mr Dombey come in – or rather when he felt that he was coming, for he had usually an instinctive sense of his approach – he hurried into Mr Dombey's room, stirred the fire, carried fresh coals from the bowels of the coal-box, hung the newspaper to air upon the fender, put the chair ready, and the screen in its place, and was round upon his heel on the instant of Mr Dombey's entrance, to take his great-coat and hat, and hang them up. Then Perch took the newspaper, and gave it a turn or two in his hands before the fire, and laid it, deferentially, at Mr Dombey's elbow. And so little objection had Perch to being deferential in the last degree, that if he might have laid himself at Mr Dombey's feet, or might have called him by some such title as used to be bestowed upon the Caliph Haroun Alraschid, he would have been all the better pleased.

As this honour would have been an innovation and an experiment, Perch was fain to content himself by expressing as well as he could, in his manner, You are the light of my Eyes. You are the Breath of my Soul. You are the commander of the Faithful Perch! With this imperfect happiness to cheer him, he would shut the door softly, walk away on tiptoe, and leave his great chief to be stared at, through a dome-shaped window in the leads, by ugly chimney-pots and backs of houses, and especially by the bold window of a hair-cutting saloon on a first floor, where a waxen effigy, bald as a Mussulman in the morning, and covered, after eleven o'clock in the day, with luxuriant hair and whiskers in the latest Christian fashion, showed him the wrong side of its head for ever.

Between Mr Dombey and the common world, as it was accessible through the medium of the outer office – to which Mr Dombey's presence in his own room may be said to have struck like damp, or cold air – there were two degrees of descent. Mr Carker in his own office was the first step; Mr Morfin, in his own office, was the second. Each of these gentlemen occupied a little chamber like a bath-room, opening from the passage outside Mr Dombey's door. Mr Carker, as Grand Vizier, inhabited the room that was nearest to the Sultan. Mr Morfin, as an officer of inferior state, inhabited the room that was nearest to the clerks.

The gentleman last mentioned was a cheerful-looking, hazel-eyed elderly bachelor: gravely attired, as to his upper man, in black; and as to his legs, in pepper-and-salt colour. His dark hair

was just touched here and there with specks of gray, as though the tread of Time had splashed it; and his whiskers were already white. He had a mighty respect for Mr Dombey, and rendered him due homage; but as he was of a genial temper himself, and never wholly at his ease in that stately presence, he was disquieted by no jealousy of the many conferences enjoyed by Mr Carker, and felt a secret satisfaction in having duties to discharge, which rarely exposed him to be singled out for such distinction. He was a great musical amateur in his way – after business; and had a paternal affection for his violoncello, which was once in every week transported from Islington, his place of abode, to a certain club-room hard by the Bank, where quartettes of the most tormenting and excruciating nature were executed every Wednesday evening by a private party.

Mr Carker was a gentleman thirty-eight or forty years old, of a florid complexion, and with two unbroken rows of glistening teeth, whose regularity and whiteness were quite distressing. It was impossible to escape the observation of them, for he showed them whenever he spoke; and bore so wide a smile upon his countenance (a smile, however, very rarely, indeed, extending beyond his mouth), that there was something in it like the snarl of a cat. He affected a stiff white cravat, after the example of his principal, and was always closely buttoned up and tightly dressed. His manner towards Mr Dombey was deeply conceived and perfectly expressed. He was familiar with him, in the very extremity of his sense of the distance between them. 'Mr

Dombey, to a man in your position from a man in mine, there is no show of subservience compatible with the transaction of business between us, that I should think sufficient. I frankly tell you, Sir, I give it up altogether. I feel that I could not satisfy my own mind; and Heaven knows, Mr Dombey, you can afford to dispense with the endeavour.' If he had carried these words about with him printed on a placard, and had constantly offered it to Mr Dombey's perusal on the breast of his coat, he could not have been more explicit than he was.

This was Carker the Manager. Mr Carker the Junior, Walter's friend, was his brother; two or three years older than he, but widely removed in station. The younger brother's post was on the top of the official ladder; the elder brother's at the bottom. The elder brother never gained a stave, or raised his foot to mount one. Young men passed above his head, and rose and rose; but he was always at the bottom. He was quite resigned to occupy that low condition: never complained of it: and certainly never hoped to escape from it.

'How do you do this morning?' said Mr Carker the Manager, entering Mr Dombey's room soon after his arrival one day: with a bundle of papers in his hand.

'How do you do, Carker?' said Mr Dombey.

'Coolish!' observed Carker, stirring the fire.

'Rather,' said Mr Dombey.

'Any news of the young gentleman who is so important to us all?' asked Carker, with his whole regiment of teeth on parade.

‘Yes – not direct news – I hear he’s very well,’ said Mr Dombey. Who had come from Brighton over-night. But no one knew It.

‘Very well, and becoming a great scholar, no doubt?’ observed the Manager.

‘I hope so,’ returned Mr Dombey.

‘Egad!’ said Mr Carker, shaking his head, ‘Time flies!’

‘I think so, sometimes,’ returned Mr Dombey, glancing at his newspaper.

‘Oh! You! You have no reason to think so,’ observed Carker. ‘One who sits on such an elevation as yours, and can sit there, unmoved, in all seasons – hasn’t much reason to know anything about the flight of time. It’s men like myself, who are low down and are not superior in circumstances, and who inherit new masters in the course of Time, that have cause to look about us. I shall have a rising sun to worship, soon.’

‘Time enough, time enough, Carker!’ said Mr Dombey, rising from his chair, and standing with his back to the fire. ‘Have you anything there for me?’

‘I don’t know that I need trouble you,’ returned Carker, turning over the papers in his hand. ‘You have a committee today at three, you know.’

‘And one at three, three-quarters,’ added Mr Dombey.

‘Catch you forgetting anything!’ exclaimed Carker, still turning over his papers. ‘If Mr Paul inherits your memory, he’ll be a troublesome customer in the House. One of you is enough.’

‘You have an accurate memory of your own,’ said Mr Dombey.

‘Oh! I!’ returned the manager. ‘It’s the only capital of a man like me.’

Mr Dombey did not look less pompous or at all displeased, as he stood leaning against the chimney-piece, surveying his (of course unconscious) clerk, from head to foot. The stiffness and nicety of Mr Carker’s dress, and a certain arrogance of manner, either natural to him or imitated from a pattern not far off, gave great additional effect to his humility. He seemed a man who would contend against the power that vanquished him, if he could, but who was utterly borne down by the greatness and superiority of Mr Dombey.

‘Is Morfin here?’ asked Mr Dombey after a short pause, during which Mr Carker had been fluttering his papers, and muttering little abstracts of their contents to himself.

‘Morfin’s here,’ he answered, looking up with his widest and almost sudden smile; ‘humming musical recollections – of his last night’s quartette party, I suppose – through the walls between us, and driving me half mad. I wish he’d make a bonfire of his violoncello, and burn his music-books in it.’

‘You respect nobody, Carker, I think,’ said Mr Dombey.

‘No?’ inquired Carker, with another wide and most feline show of his teeth. ‘Well! Not many people, I believe. I wouldn’t answer perhaps,’ he murmured, as if he were only thinking it, ‘for more than one.’

A dangerous quality, if real; and a not less dangerous one, if feigned. But Mr Dombey hardly seemed to think so, as he still stood with his back to the fire, drawn up to his full height, and looking at his head-clerk with a dignified composure, in which there seemed to lurk a stronger latent sense of power than usual.

'Talking of Morfin,' resumed Mr Carker, taking out one paper from the rest, 'he reports a junior dead in the agency at Barbados, and proposes to reserve a passage in the Son and Heir – she'll sail in a month or so – for the successor. You don't care who goes, I suppose? We have nobody of that sort here.'

Mr Dombey shook his head with supreme indifference.

'It's no very precious appointment,' observed Mr Carker, taking up a pen, with which to endorse a memorandum on the back of the paper. 'I hope he may bestow it on some orphan nephew of a musical friend. It may perhaps stop his fiddle-playing, if he has a gift that way. Who's that? Come in!'

'I beg your pardon, Mr Carker. I didn't know you were here, Sir,' answered Walter; appearing with some letters in his hand, unopened, and newly arrived. 'Mr Carker the junior, Sir – '

At the mention of this name, Mr Carker the Manager was or affected to be, touched to the quick with shame and humiliation. He cast his eyes full on Mr Dombey with an altered and apologetic look, abased them on the ground, and remained for a moment without speaking.

'I thought, Sir,' he said suddenly and angrily, turning on Walter, 'that you had been before requested not to drag Mr

Carker the Junior into your conversation.'

'I beg your pardon,' returned Walter. 'I was only going to say that Mr Carker the Junior had told me he believed you were gone out, or I should not have knocked at the door when you were engaged with Mr Dombey. These are letters for Mr Dombey, Sir.'

'Very well, Sir,' returned Mr Carker the Manager, plucking them sharply from his hand. 'Go about your business.'

But in taking them with so little ceremony, Mr Carker dropped one on the floor, and did not see what he had done; neither did Mr Dombey observe the letter lying near his feet. Walter hesitated for a moment, thinking that one or other of them would notice it; but finding that neither did, he stopped, came back, picked it up, and laid it himself on Mr Dombey's desk. The letters were post-letters; and it happened that the one in question was Mrs Pipchin's regular report, directed as usual – for Mrs Pipchin was but an indifferent penwoman – by Florence. Mr Dombey, having his attention silently called to this letter by Walter, started, and looked fiercely at him, as if he believed that he had purposely selected it from all the rest.

'You can leave the room, Sir!' said Mr Dombey, haughtily.

He crushed the letter in his hand; and having watched Walter out at the door, put it in his pocket without breaking the seal.

'These continual references to Mr Carker the Junior,' Mr Carker the Manager began, as soon as they were alone, 'are, to a man in my position, uttered before one in yours, so unspeakably distressing – '

‘Nonsense, Carker,’ Mr Dombey interrupted. ‘You are too sensitive.’

‘I am sensitive,’ he returned. ‘If one in your position could by any possibility imagine yourself in my place: which you cannot: you would be so too.’

As Mr Dombey’s thoughts were evidently pursuing some other subject, his discreet ally broke off here, and stood with his teeth ready to present to him, when he should look up.

‘You want somebody to send to the West Indies, you were saying,’ observed Mr Dombey, hurriedly.

‘Yes,’ replied Carker.

‘Send young Gay.’

‘Good, very good indeed. Nothing easier,’ said Mr Carker, without any show of surprise, and taking up the pen to re-endorse the letter, as coolly as he had done before. ‘“Send young Gay.”’

‘Call him back,’ said Mr Dombey.

Mr Carker was quick to do so, and Walter was quick to return.

‘Gay,’ said Mr Dombey, turning a little to look at him over his shoulder. ‘Here is a – ’

‘An opening,’ said Mr Carker, with his mouth stretched to the utmost.

‘In the West Indies. At Barbados. I am going to send you,’ said Mr Dombey, scorning to embellish the bare truth, ‘to fill a junior situation in the counting-house at Barbados. Let your Uncle know from me, that I have chosen you to go to the West Indies.’

Walter's breath was so completely taken away by his astonishment, that he could hardly find enough for the repetition of the words 'West Indies.'

'Somebody must go,' said Mr Dombey, 'and you are young and healthy, and your Uncle's circumstances are not good. Tell your Uncle that you are appointed. You will not go yet. There will be an interval of a month – or two perhaps.'

'Shall I remain there, Sir?' inquired Walter.

'Will you remain there, Sir!' repeated Mr Dombey, turning a little more round towards him. 'What do you mean? What does he mean, Carker?'

'Live there, Sir,' faltered Walter.

'Certainly,' returned Mr Dombey.

Walter bowed.

'That's all,' said Mr Dombey, resuming his letters. 'You will explain to him in good time about the usual outfit and so forth, Carker, of course. He needn't wait, Carker.'

'You needn't wait, Gay,' observed Mr Carker: bare to the gums.

'Unless,' said Mr Dombey, stopping in his reading without looking off the letter, and seeming to listen. 'Unless he has anything to say.'

'No, Sir,' returned Walter, agitated and confused, and almost stunned, as an infinite variety of pictures presented themselves to his mind; among which Captain Cuttle, in his glazed hat, transfixed with astonishment at Mrs MacStinger's, and his uncle

bemoaning his loss in the little back parlour, held prominent places. 'I hardly know – I – I am much obliged, Sir.'

'He needn't wait, Carker,' said Mr Dombey.

And as Mr Carker again echoed the words, and also collected his papers as if he were going away too, Walter felt that his lingering any longer would be an unpardonable intrusion – especially as he had nothing to say – and therefore walked out quite confounded.

Going along the passage, with the mingled consciousness and helplessness of a dream, he heard Mr Dombey's door shut again, as Mr Carker came out: and immediately afterwards that gentleman called to him.

'Bring your friend Mr Carker the Junior to my room, Sir, if you please.'

Walter went to the outer office and apprised Mr Carker the Junior of his errand, who accordingly came out from behind a partition where he sat alone in one corner, and returned with him to the room of Mr Carker the Manager.

That gentleman was standing with his back to the fire, and his hands under his coat-tails, looking over his white cravat, as unpromisingly as Mr Dombey himself could have looked. He received them without any change in his attitude or softening of his harsh and black expression: merely signing to Walter to close the door.

'John Carker,' said the Manager, when this was done, turning suddenly upon his brother, with his two rows of teeth bristling as

if he would have bitten him, 'what is the league between you and this young man, in virtue of which I am haunted and hunted by the mention of your name? Is it not enough for you, John Carker, that I am your near relation, and can't detach myself from that – '

'Say disgrace, James,' interposed the other in a low voice, finding that he stammered for a word. 'You mean it, and have reason, say disgrace.'

'From that disgrace,' assented his brother with keen emphasis, 'but is the fact to be blurted out and trumpeted, and proclaimed continually in the presence of the very House! In moments of confidence too? Do you think your name is calculated to harmonise in this place with trust and confidence, John Carker?'

'No,' returned the other. 'No, James. God knows I have no such thought.'

'What is your thought, then?' said his brother, 'and why do you thrust yourself in my way? Haven't you injured me enough already?'

'I have never injured you, James, wilfully.'

'You are my brother,' said the Manager. 'That's injury enough.'

'I wish I could undo it, James.'

'I wish you could and would.'

During this conversation, Walter had looked from one brother to the other, with pain and amazement. He who was the Senior in years, and Junior in the House, stood, with his eyes cast upon the ground, and his head bowed, humbly listening to the reproaches of the other. Though these were rendered very bitter by the

tone and look with which they were accompanied, and by the presence of Walter whom they so much surprised and shocked, he entered no other protest against them than by slightly raising his right hand in a deprecatory manner, as if he would have said, 'Spare me!' So, had they been blows, and he a brave man, under strong constraint, and weakened by bodily suffering, he might have stood before the executioner.

Generous and quick in all his emotions, and regarding himself as the innocent occasion of these taunts, Walter now struck in, with all the earnestness he felt.

'Mr Carker,' he said, addressing himself to the Manager. 'Indeed, indeed, this is my fault solely. In a kind of heedlessness, for which I cannot blame myself enough, I have, I have no doubt, mentioned Mr Carker the Junior much oftener than was necessary; and have allowed his name sometimes to slip through my lips, when it was against your expressed wish. But it has been my own mistake, Sir. We have never exchanged one word upon the subject – very few, indeed, on any subject. And it has not been,' added Walter, after a moment's pause, 'all heedlessness on my part, Sir; for I have felt an interest in Mr Carker ever since I have been here, and have hardly been able to help speaking of him sometimes, when I have thought of him so much!'

Walter said this from his soul, and with the very breath of honour. For he looked upon the bowed head, and the downcast eyes, and upraised hand, and thought, 'I have felt it; and why should I not avow it in behalf of this unfriended, broken man!'

Mr Carker the Manager looked at him, as he spoke, and when he had finished speaking, with a smile that seemed to divide his face into two parts.

'You are an excitable youth, Gay,' he said; 'and should endeavour to cool down a little now, for it would be unwise to encourage feverish predispositions. Be as cool as you can, Gay. Be as cool as you can. You might have asked Mr John Carker himself (if you have not done so) whether he claims to be, or is, an object of such strong interest.'

'James, do me justice,' said his brother. 'I have claimed nothing; and I claim nothing. Believe me, on my – '

'Honour?' said his brother, with another smile, as he warmed himself before the fire.

'On my Me – on my fallen life!' returned the other, in the same low voice, but with a deeper stress on his words than he had yet seemed capable of giving them. 'Believe me, I have held myself aloof, and kept alone. This has been unsought by me. I have avoided him and everyone.

'Indeed, you have avoided me, Mr Carker,' said Walter, with the tears rising to his eyes; so true was his compassion. 'I know it, to my disappointment and regret. When I first came here, and ever since, I am sure I have tried to be as much your friend, as one of my age could presume to be; but it has been of no use.

'And observe,' said the Manager, taking him up quickly, 'it will be of still less use, Gay, if you persist in forcing Mr John Carker's name on people's attention. That is not the way to befriend Mr

John Carker. Ask him if he thinks it is.'

'It is no service to me,' said the brother. 'It only leads to such a conversation as the present, which I need not say I could have well spared. No one can be a better friend to me:' he spoke here very distinctly, as if he would impress it upon Walter: 'than in forgetting me, and leaving me to go my way, unquestioned and unnoticed.'

'Your memory not being retentive, Gay, of what you are told by others,' said Mr Carker the Manager, warming himself with great and increased satisfaction, 'I thought it well that you should be told this from the best authority,' nodding towards his brother. 'You are not likely to forget it now, I hope. That's all, Gay. You can go.'

Walter passed out at the door, and was about to close it after him, when, hearing the voices of the brothers again, and also the mention of his own name, he stood irresolutely, with his hand upon the lock, and the door ajar, uncertain whether to return or go away. In this position he could not help overhearing what followed.

'Think of me more leniently, if you can, James,' said John Carker, 'when I tell you I have had – how could I help having, with my history, written here' – striking himself upon the breast – 'my whole heart awakened by my observation of that boy, Walter Gay. I saw in him when he first came here, almost my other self.'

'Your other self!' repeated the Manager, disdainfully.

'Not as I am, but as I was when I first came here too; as

sanguine, giddy, youthful, inexperienced; flushed with the same restless and adventurous fancies; and full of the same qualities, fraught with the same capacity of leading on to good or evil.'

'I hope not,' said his brother, with some hidden and sarcastic meaning in his tone.

'You strike me sharply; and your hand is steady, and your thrust is very deep,' returned the other, speaking (or so Walter thought) as if some cruel weapon actually stabbed him as he spoke. 'I imagined all this when he was a boy. I believed it. It was a truth to me. I saw him lightly walking on the edge of an unseen gulf where so many others walk with equal gaiety, and from which – '

'The old excuse,' interrupted his brother, as he stirred the fire. 'So many. Go on. Say, so many fall.'

'From which ONE traveller fell,' returned the other, 'who set forward, on his way, a boy like him, and missed his footing more and more, and slipped a little and a little lower; and went on stumbling still, until he fell headlong and found himself below a shattered man. Think what I suffered, when I watched that boy.'

'You have only yourself to thank for it,' returned the brother.

'Only myself,' he assented with a sigh. 'I don't seek to divide the blame or shame.'

'You have divided the shame,' James Carker muttered through his teeth. And, through so many and such close teeth, he could mutter well.

'Ah, James,' returned his brother, speaking for the first time

in an accent of reproach, and seeming, by the sound of his voice, to have covered his face with his hands, 'I have been, since then, a useful foil to you. You have trodden on me freely in your climbing up. Don't spurn me with your heel!'

A silence ensued. After a time, Mr Carker the Manager was heard rustling among his papers, as if he had resolved to bring the interview to a conclusion. At the same time his brother withdrew nearer to the door.

'That's all,' he said. 'I watched him with such trembling and such fear, as was some little punishment to me, until he passed the place where I first fell; and then, though I had been his father, I believe I never could have thanked God more devoutly. I didn't dare to warn him, and advise him; but if I had seen direct cause, I would have shown him my example. I was afraid to be seen speaking with him, lest it should be thought I did him harm, and tempted him to evil, and corrupted him: or lest I really should. There may be such contagion in me; I don't know. Piece out my history, in connexion with young Walter Gay, and what he has made me feel; and think of me more leniently, James, if you can.'

With these words he came out to where Walter was standing. He turned a little paler when he saw him there, and paler yet when Walter caught him by the hand, and said in a whisper:

'Mr Carker, pray let me thank you! Let me say how much I feel for you! How sorry I am, to have been the unhappy cause of all this! How I almost look upon you now as my protector and guardian! How very, very much, I feel obliged to you and pity

you!' said Walter, squeezing both his hands, and hardly knowing, in his agitation, what he did or said.

Mr Morfin's room being close at hand and empty, and the door wide open, they moved thither by one accord: the passage being seldom free from someone passing to or fro. When they were there, and Walter saw in Mr Carker's face some traces of the emotion within, he almost felt as if he had never seen the face before; it was so greatly changed.

'Walter,' he said, laying his hand on his shoulder. 'I am far removed from you, and may I ever be. Do you know what I am?'

'What you are!' appeared to hang on Walter's lips, as he regarded him attentively.

'It was begun,' said Carker, 'before my twenty-first birthday – led up to, long before, but not begun till near that time. I had robbed them when I came of age. I robbed them afterwards. Before my twenty-second birthday, it was all found out; and then, Walter, from all men's society, I died.'

Again his last few words hung trembling upon Walter's lips, but he could neither utter them, nor any of his own.

'The House was very good to me. May Heaven reward the old man for his forbearance! This one, too, his son, who was then newly in the Firm, where I had held great trust! I was called into that room which is now his – I have never entered it since – and came out, what you know me. For many years I sat in my present seat, alone as now, but then a known and recognised example to the rest. They were all merciful to me, and I lived. Time has

altered that part of my poor expiation; and I think, except the three heads of the House, there is no one here who knows my story rightly. Before the little boy grows up, and has it told to him, my corner may be vacant. I would rather that it might be so! This is the only change to me since that day, when I left all youth, and hope, and good men's company, behind me in that room. God bless you, Walter! Keep you, and all dear to you, in honesty, or strike them dead!'

Some recollection of his trembling from head to foot, as if with excessive cold, and of his bursting into tears, was all that Walter could add to this, when he tried to recall exactly what had passed between them.

When Walter saw him next, he was bending over his desk in his old silent, drooping, humbled way. Then, observing him at his work, and feeling how resolved he evidently was that no further intercourse should arise between them, and thinking again and again on all he had seen and heard that morning in so short a time, in connexion with the history of both the Carkers, Walter could hardly believe that he was under orders for the West Indies, and would soon be lost to Uncle Sol, and Captain Cuttle, and to glimpses few and far between of Florence Dombey – no, he meant Paul – and to all he loved, and liked, and looked for, in his daily life.

But it was true, and the news had already penetrated to the outer office; for while he sat with a heavy heart, pondering on these things, and resting his head upon his arm, Perch the

messenger, descending from his mahogany bracket, and jogging his elbow, begged his pardon, but wished to say in his ear, Did he think he could arrange to send home to England a jar of preserved Ginger, cheap, for Mrs Perch's own eating, in the course of her recovery from her next confinement?

CHAPTER 14. Paul grows more and more Old-fashioned, and goes Home for the Holidays

When the Midsummer vacation approached, no indecent manifestations of joy were exhibited by the leaden-eyed young gentlemen assembled at Doctor Blimber's. Any such violent expression as 'breaking up,' would have been quite inapplicable to that polite establishment. The young gentlemen oozed away, semi-annually, to their own homes; but they never broke up. They would have scorned the action.

Tozer, who was constantly galled and tormented by a starched white cambric neckerchief, which he wore at the express desire of Mrs Tozer, his parent, who, designing him for the Church, was of opinion that he couldn't be in that forward state of preparation too soon – Tozer said, indeed, that choosing between two evils, he thought he would rather stay where he was, than go home. However inconsistent this declaration might appear with that passage in Tozer's Essay on the subject, wherein he had observed 'that the thoughts of home and all its recollections, awakened in his mind the most pleasing emotions of anticipation and delight,' and had also likened himself to a Roman General, flushed with a recent victory over the Iceni, or laden with Carthaginian spoil, advancing within a few hours' march of the Capitol, presupposed,

for the purposes of the simile, to be the dwelling-place of Mrs Tozer, still it was very sincerely made. For it seemed that Tozer had a dreadful Uncle, who not only volunteered examinations of him, in the holidays, on abstruse points, but twisted innocent events and things, and wrenched them to the same fell purpose. So that if this Uncle took him to the Play, or, on a similar pretence of kindness, carried him to see a Giant, or a Dwarf, or a Conjuror, or anything, Tozer knew he had read up some classical allusion to the subject beforehand, and was thrown into a state of mortal apprehension: not foreseeing where he might break out, or what authority he might not quote against him.

As to Briggs, his father made no show of artifice about it. He never would leave him alone. So numerous and severe were the mental trials of that unfortunate youth in vacation time, that the friends of the family (then resident near Bayswater, London) seldom approached the ornamental piece of water in Kensington Gardens, without a vague expectation of seeing Master Briggs's hat floating on the surface, and an unfinished exercise lying on the bank. Briggs, therefore, was not at all sanguine on the subject of holidays; and these two sharers of little Paul's bedroom were so fair a sample of the young gentlemen in general, that the most elastic among them contemplated the arrival of those festive periods with genteel resignation.

It was far otherwise with little Paul. The end of these first holidays was to witness his separation from Florence, but who ever looked forward to the end of holidays whose beginning

was not yet come! Not Paul, assuredly. As the happy time drew near, the lions and tigers climbing up the bedroom walls became quite tame and frolicsome. The grim sly faces in the squares and diamonds of the floor-cloth, relaxed and peeped out at him with less wicked eyes. The grave old clock had more of personal interest in the tone of its formal inquiry; and the restless sea went rolling on all night, to the sounding of a melancholy strain – yet it was pleasant too – that rose and fell with the waves, and rocked him, as it were, to sleep.

Mr Feeder, B.A., seemed to think that he, too, would enjoy the holidays very much. Mr Toots projected a life of holidays from that time forth; for, as he regularly informed Paul every day, it was his 'last half' at Doctor Blimber's, and he was going to begin to come into his property directly.

It was perfectly understood between Paul and Mr Toots, that they were intimate friends, notwithstanding their distance in point of years and station. As the vacation approached, and Mr Toots breathed harder and stared oftener in Paul's society, than he had done before, Paul knew that he meant he was sorry they were going to lose sight of each other, and felt very much obliged to him for his patronage and good opinion.

It was even understood by Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber, as well as by the young gentlemen in general, that Toots had somehow constituted himself protector and guardian of Dombey, and the circumstance became so notorious, even to Mrs Pipchin, that the good old creature cherished feelings

of bitterness and jealousy against Toots; and, in the sanctuary of her own home, repeatedly denounced him as a 'chuckle-headed noodle.' Whereas the innocent Toots had no more idea of awakening Mrs Pipchin's wrath, than he had of any other definite possibility or proposition. On the contrary, he was disposed to consider her rather a remarkable character, with many points of interest about her. For this reason he smiled on her with so much urbanity, and asked her how she did, so often, in the course of her visits to little Paul, that at last she one night told him plainly, she wasn't used to it, whatever he might think; and she could not, and she would not bear it, either from himself or any other puppy then existing: at which unexpected acknowledgment of his civilities, Mr Toots was so alarmed that he secreted himself in a retired spot until she had gone. Nor did he ever again face the doughty Mrs Pipchin, under Doctor Blimber's roof.

They were within two or three weeks of the holidays, when, one day, Cornelia Blimber called Paul into her room, and said, 'Dombey, I am going to send home your analysis.'

'Thank you, Ma'am,' returned Paul.

'You know what I mean, do you, Dombey?' inquired Miss Blimber, looking hard at him, through the spectacles.

'No, Ma'am,' said Paul.

'Dombey, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber, 'I begin to be afraid you are a sad boy. When you don't know the meaning of an expression, why don't you seek for information?'

'Mrs Pipchin told me I wasn't to ask questions,' returned Paul.

‘I must beg you not to mention Mrs Pipchin to me, on any account, Dombey,’ returned Miss Blimber. ‘I couldn’t think of allowing it. The course of study here, is very far removed from anything of that sort. A repetition of such allusions would make it necessary for me to request to hear, without a mistake, before breakfast-time to-morrow morning, from Verbum personale down to simillimia cygno.’

‘I didn’t mean, Ma’am – ’ began little Paul.

‘I must trouble you not to tell me that you didn’t mean, if you please, Dombey,’ said Miss Blimber, who preserved an awful politeness in her admonitions. ‘That is a line of argument I couldn’t dream of permitting.’

Paul felt it safest to say nothing at all, so he only looked at Miss Blimber’s spectacles. Miss Blimber having shaken her head at him gravely, referred to a paper lying before her.

‘“Analysis of the character of P. Dombey.” If my recollection serves me,’ said Miss Blimber breaking off, ‘the word analysis as opposed to synthesis, is thus defined by Walker. “The resolution of an object, whether of the senses or of the intellect, into its first elements.” As opposed to synthesis, you observe. Now you know what analysis is, Dombey.’

Dombey didn’t seem to be absolutely blinded by the light let in upon his intellect, but he made Miss Blimber a little bow.

‘“Analysis,”’ resumed Miss Blimber, casting her eye over the paper, ‘“of the character of P. Dombey.” I find that the natural capacity of Dombey is extremely good; and that his general

disposition to study may be stated in an equal ratio. Thus, taking eight as our standard and highest number, I find these qualities in Dombey stated each at six three-fourths!'

Miss Blimber paused to see how Paul received this news. Being undecided whether six three-fourths meant six pounds fifteen, or sixpence three farthings, or six foot three, or three quarters past six, or six somethings that he hadn't learnt yet, with three unknown something elses over, Paul rubbed his hands and looked straight at Miss Blimber. It happened to answer as well as anything else he could have done; and Cornelia proceeded.

'"Violence two. Selfishness two. Inclination to low company, as evinced in the case of a person named Glubb, originally seven, but since reduced. Gentlemanly demeanour four, and improving with advancing years." Now what I particularly wish to call your attention to, Dombey, is the general observation at the close of this analysis.'

Paul set himself to follow it with great care.

'"It may be generally observed of Dombey,"' said Miss Blimber, reading in a loud voice, and at every second word directing her spectacles towards the little figure before her: '"that his abilities and inclinations are good, and that he has made as much progress as under the circumstances could have been expected. But it is to be lamented of this young gentleman that he is singular (what is usually termed old-fashioned) in his character and conduct, and that, without presenting anything in either which distinctly calls for reprobation, he is often very unlike

other young gentlemen of his age and social position." Now, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber, laying down the paper, 'do you understand that?'

'I think I do, Ma'am,' said Paul.

'This analysis, you see, Dombey,' Miss Blimber continued, 'is going to be sent home to your respected parent. It will naturally be very painful to him to find that you are singular in your character and conduct. It is naturally painful to us; for we can't like you, you know, Dombey, as well as we could wish.'

She touched the child upon a tender point. He had secretly become more and more solicitous from day to day, as the time of his departure drew more near, that all the house should like him. From some hidden reason, very imperfectly understood by himself – if understood at all – he felt a gradually increasing impulse of affection, towards almost everything and everybody in the place. He could not bear to think that they would be quite indifferent to him when he was gone. He wanted them to remember him kindly; and he had made it his business even to conciliate a great hoarse shaggy dog, chained up at the back of the house, who had previously been the terror of his life: that even he might miss him when he was no longer there.

Little thinking that in this, he only showed again the difference between himself and his compeers, poor tiny Paul set it forth to Miss Blimber as well as he could, and begged her, in despite of the official analysis, to have the goodness to try and like him. To Mrs Blimber, who had joined them, he preferred the

same petition: and when that lady could not forbear, even in his presence, from giving utterance to her often-repeated opinion, that he was an odd child, Paul told her that he was sure she was quite right; that he thought it must be his bones, but he didn't know; and that he hoped she would overlook it, for he was fond of them all.

'Not so fond,' said Paul, with a mixture of timidity and perfect frankness, which was one of the most peculiar and most engaging qualities of the child, 'not so fond as I am of Florence, of course; that could never be. You couldn't expect that, could you, Ma'am?'

'Oh! the old-fashioned little soul!' cried Mrs Blimber, in a whisper.

'But I like everybody here very much,' pursued Paul, 'and I should grieve to go away, and think that anyone was glad that I was gone, or didn't care.'

Mrs Blimber was now quite sure that Paul was the oddest child in the world; and when she told the Doctor what had passed, the Doctor did not controvert his wife's opinion. But he said, as he had said before, when Paul first came, that study would do much; and he also said, as he had said on that occasion, 'Bring him on, Cornelia! Bring him on!'

Cornelia had always brought him on as vigorously as she could; and Paul had had a hard life of it. But over and above the getting through his tasks, he had long had another purpose always present to him, and to which he still held fast. It was, to be a gentle, useful, quiet little fellow, always striving to secure

the love and attachment of the rest; and though he was yet often to be seen at his old post on the stairs, or watching the waves and clouds from his solitary window, he was oftener found, too, among the other boys, modestly rendering them some little voluntary service. Thus it came to pass, that even among those rigid and absorbed young anchorites, who mortified themselves beneath the roof of Doctor Blimber, Paul was an object of general interest; a fragile little plaything that they all liked, and that no one would have thought of treating roughly. But he could not change his nature, or rewrite the analysis; and so they all agreed that Dombey was old-fashioned.

There were some immunities, however, attaching to the character enjoyed by no one else. They could have better spared a newer-fashioned child, and that alone was much. When the others only bowed to Doctor Blimber and family on retiring for the night, Paul would stretch out his morsel of a hand, and boldly shake the Doctor's; also Mrs Blimber's; also Cornelia's. If anybody was to be begged off from impending punishment, Paul was always the delegate. The weak-eyed young man himself had once consulted him, in reference to a little breakage of glass and china. And it was darkly rumoured that the butler, regarding him with favour such as that stern man had never shown before to mortal boy, had sometimes mingled porter with his table-beer to make him strong.

Over and above these extensive privileges, Paul had free right of entry to Mr Feeder's room, from which apartment he had

twice led Mr Toots into the open air in a state of faintness, consequent on an unsuccessful attempt to smoke a very blunt cigar: one of a bundle which that young gentleman had covertly purchased on the shingle from a most desperate smuggler, who had acknowledged, in confidence, that two hundred pounds was the price set upon his head, dead or alive, by the Custom House. It was a snug room, Mr Feeder's, with his bed in another little room inside of it; and a flute, which Mr Feeder couldn't play yet, but was going to make a point of learning, he said, hanging up over the fireplace. There were some books in it, too, and a fishing-rod; for Mr Feeder said he should certainly make a point of learning to fish, when he could find time. Mr Feeder had amassed, with similar intentions, a beautiful little curly secondhand key-bugle, a chess-board and men, a Spanish Grammar, a set of sketching materials, and a pair of boxing-gloves. The art of self-defence Mr Feeder said he should undoubtedly make a point of learning, as he considered it the duty of every man to do; for it might lead to the protection of a female in distress.

But Mr Feeder's great possession was a large green jar of snuff, which Mr Toots had brought down as a present, at the close of the last vacation; and for which he had paid a high price, having been the genuine property of the Prince Regent. Neither Mr Toots nor Mr Feeder could partake of this or any other snuff, even in the most stinted and moderate degree, without being seized with convulsions of sneezing. Nevertheless it was their

great delight to moisten a box-full with cold tea, stir it up on a piece of parchment with a paper-knife, and devote themselves to its consumption then and there. In the course of which cramming of their noses, they endured surprising torments with the constancy of martyrs: and, drinking table-beer at intervals, felt all the glories of dissipation.

To little Paul sitting silent in their company, and by the side of his chief patron, Mr Toots, there was a dread charm in these reckless occasions: and when Mr Feeder spoke of the dark mysteries of London, and told Mr Toots that he was going to observe it himself closely in all its ramifications in the approaching holidays, and for that purpose had made arrangements to board with two old maiden ladies at Peckham, Paul regarded him as if he were the hero of some book of travels or wild adventure, and was almost afraid of such a slashing person.

Going into this room one evening, when the holidays were very near, Paul found Mr Feeder filling up the blanks in some printed letters, while some others, already filled up and strewn before him, were being folded and sealed by Mr Toots. Mr Feeder said, 'Aha, Dombey, there you are, are you?' – for they were always kind to him, and glad to see him – and then said, tossing one of the letters towards him, 'And there you are, too, Dombey. That's yours.'

'Mine, Sir?' said Paul.

'Your invitation,' returned Mr Feeder.

Paul, looking at it, found, in copper-plate print, with the exception of his own name and the date, which were in Mr Feeder's penmanship, that Doctor and Mrs Blimber requested the pleasure of Mr P. Dombey's company at an early party on Wednesday Evening the Seventeenth Instant; and that the hour was half-past seven o'clock; and that the object was Quadrilles. Mr Toots also showed him, by holding up a companion sheet of paper, that Doctor and Mrs Blimber requested the pleasure of Mr Toots's company at an early party on Wednesday Evening the Seventeenth Instant, when the hour was half-past seven o'clock, and when the object was Quadrilles. He also found, on glancing at the table where Mr Feeder sat, that the pleasure of Mr Briggs's company, and of Mr Tozer's company, and of every young gentleman's company, was requested by Doctor and Mrs Blimber on the same genteel Occasion.

Mr Feeder then told him, to his great joy, that his sister was invited, and that it was a half-yearly event, and that, as the holidays began that day, he could go away with his sister after the party, if he liked, which Paul interrupted him to say he would like, very much. Mr Feeder then gave him to understand that he would be expected to inform Doctor and Mrs Blimber, in superfine small-hand, that Mr P. Dombey would be happy to have the honour of waiting on them, in accordance with their polite invitation. Lastly, Mr Feeder said, he had better not refer to the festive occasion, in the hearing of Doctor and Mrs Blimber; as these preliminaries, and the whole of the arrangements,

were conducted on principles of classicality and high breeding; and that Doctor and Mrs Blimber on the one hand, and the young gentlemen on the other, were supposed, in their scholastic capacities, not to have the least idea of what was in the wind.

Paul thanked Mr Feeder for these hints, and pocketing his invitation, sat down on a stool by the side of Mr Toots, as usual. But Paul's head, which had long been ailing more or less, and was sometimes very heavy and painful, felt so uneasy that night, that he was obliged to support it on his hand. And yet it dropped so, that by little and little it sunk on Mr Toots's knee, and rested there, as if it had no care to be ever lifted up again.

That was no reason why he should be deaf; but he must have been, he thought, for, by and by, he heard Mr Feeder calling in his ear, and gently shaking him to rouse his attention. And when he raised his head, quite scared, and looked about him, he found that Doctor Blimber had come into the room; and that the window was open, and that his forehead was wet with sprinkled water; though how all this had been done without his knowledge, was very curious indeed.

'Ah! Come, come! That's well! How is my little friend now?' said Doctor Blimber, encouragingly.

'Oh, quite well, thank you, Sir,' said Paul.

But there seemed to be something the matter with the floor, for he couldn't stand upon it steadily; and with the walls too, for they were inclined to turn round and round, and could only be stopped by being looked at very hard indeed. Mr Toots's head

had the appearance of being at once bigger and farther off than was quite natural; and when he took Paul in his arms, to carry him upstairs, Paul observed with astonishment that the door was in quite a different place from that in which he had expected to find it, and almost thought, at first, that Mr Toots was going to walk straight up the chimney.

It was very kind of Mr Toots to carry him to the top of the house so tenderly; and Paul told him that it was. But Mr Toots said he would do a great deal more than that, if he could; and indeed he did more as it was: for he helped Paul to undress, and helped him to bed, in the kindest manner possible, and then sat down by the bedside and chuckled very much; while Mr Feeder, B.A., leaning over the bottom of the bedstead, set all the little bristles on his head bolt upright with his bony hands, and then made believe to spar at Paul with great science, on account of his being all right again, which was so uncommonly facetious, and kind too in Mr Feeder, that Paul, not being able to make up his mind whether it was best to laugh or cry at him, did both at once.

How Mr Toots melted away, and Mr Feeder changed into Mrs Pipchin, Paul never thought of asking; neither was he at all curious to know; but when he saw Mrs Pipchin standing at the bottom of the bed, instead of Mr Feeder, he cried out, 'Mrs Pipchin, don't tell Florence!'

'Don't tell Florence what, my little Paul?' said Mrs Pipchin, coming round to the bedside, and sitting down in the chair.

'About me,' said Paul.

‘No, no,’ said Mrs Pipchin.

‘What do you think I mean to do when I grow up, Mrs Pipchin?’ inquired Paul, turning his face towards her on his pillow, and resting his chin wistfully on his folded hands.

Mrs Pipchin couldn’t guess.

‘I mean,’ said Paul, ‘to put my money all together in one Bank, never try to get any more, go away into the country with my darling Florence, have a beautiful garden, fields, and woods, and live there with her all my life!’

‘Indeed!’ cried Mrs Pipchin.

‘Yes,’ said Paul. ‘That’s what I mean to do, when I – ’ He stopped, and pondered for a moment.

Mrs Pipchin’s grey eye scanned his thoughtful face.

‘If I grow up,’ said Paul. Then he went on immediately to tell Mrs Pipchin all about the party, about Florence’s invitation, about the pride he would have in the admiration that would be felt for her by all the boys, about their being so kind to him and fond of him, about his being so fond of them, and about his being so glad of it. Then he told Mrs Pipchin about the analysis, and about his being certainly old-fashioned, and took Mrs Pipchin’s opinion on that point, and whether she knew why it was, and what it meant. Mrs Pipchin denied the fact altogether, as the shortest way of getting out of the difficulty; but Paul was far from satisfied with that reply, and looked so searchingly at Mrs Pipchin for a truer answer, that she was obliged to get up and look out of the window to avoid his eyes.

There was a certain calm Apothecary, who attended at the establishment when any of the young gentlemen were ill, and somehow he got into the room and appeared at the bedside, with Mrs Blimber. How they came there, or how long they had been there, Paul didn't know; but when he saw them, he sat up in bed, and answered all the Apothecary's questions at full length, and whispered to him that Florence was not to know anything about it, if he pleased, and that he had set his mind upon her coming to the party. He was very chatty with the Apothecary, and they parted excellent friends. Lying down again with his eyes shut, he heard the Apothecary say, out of the room and quite a long way off – or he dreamed it – that there was a want of vital power (what was that, Paul wondered!) and great constitutional weakness. That as the little fellow had set his heart on parting with his school-mates on the seventeenth, it would be better to indulge the fancy if he grew no worse. That he was glad to hear from Mrs Pipchin, that the little fellow would go to his friends in London on the eighteenth. That he would write to Mr Dombey, when he should have gained a better knowledge of the case, and before that day. That there was no immediate cause for – what? Paul lost that word. And that the little fellow had a fine mind, but was an old-fashioned boy.

What old fashion could that be, Paul wondered with a palpitating heart, that was so visibly expressed in him; so plainly seen by so many people!

He could neither make it out, nor trouble himself long with

the effort. Mrs Pipchin was again beside him, if she had ever been away (he thought she had gone out with the Doctor, but it was all a dream perhaps), and presently a bottle and glass got into her hands magically, and she poured out the contents for him. After that, he had some real good jelly, which Mrs Blimber brought to him herself; and then he was so well, that Mrs Pipchin went home, at his urgent solicitation, and Briggs and Tozer came to bed. Poor Briggs grumbled terribly about his own analysis, which could hardly have discomposed him more if it had been a chemical process; but he was very good to Paul, and so was Tozer, and so were all the rest, for they every one looked in before going to bed, and said, 'How are you now, Dombey?' 'Cheer up, little Dombey!' and so forth. After Briggs had got into bed, he lay awake for a long time, still bemoaning his analysis, and saying he knew it was all wrong, and they couldn't have analysed a murderer worse, and – how would Doctor Blimber like it if his pocket-money depended on it? It was very easy, Briggs said, to make a galley-slave of a boy all the half-year, and then score him up idle; and to crib two dinners a-week out of his board, and then score him up greedy; but that wasn't going to be submitted to, he believed, was it? Oh! Ah!

Before the weak-eyed young man performed on the gong next morning, he came upstairs to Paul and told him he was to lie still, which Paul very gladly did. Mrs Pipchin reappeared a little before the Apothecary, and a little after the good young woman whom Paul had seen cleaning the stove on that first morning (how

long ago it seemed now!) had brought him his breakfast. There was another consultation a long way off, or else Paul dreamed it again; and then the Apothecary, coming back with Doctor and Mrs Blimber, said:

'Yes, I think, Doctor Blimber, we may release this young gentleman from his books just now; the vacation being so very near at hand.'

'By all means,' said Doctor Blimber. 'My love, you will inform Cornelia, if you please.'

'Assuredly,' said Mrs Blimber.

The Apothecary bending down, looked closely into Paul's eyes, and felt his head, and his pulse, and his heart, with so much interest and care, that Paul said, 'Thank you, Sir.'

'Our little friend,' observed Doctor Blimber, 'has never complained.'

'Oh no!' replied the Apothecary. 'He was not likely to complain.'

'You find him greatly better?' said Doctor Blimber.

'Oh! he is greatly better, Sir,' returned the Apothecary.

Paul had begun to speculate, in his own odd way, on the subject that might occupy the Apothecary's mind just at that moment; so musingly had he answered the two questions of Doctor Blimber. But the Apothecary happening to meet his little patient's eyes, as the latter set off on that mental expedition, and coming instantly out of his abstraction with a cheerful smile, Paul smiled in return and abandoned it.

He lay in bed all that day, dozing and dreaming, and looking at Mr Toots; but got up on the next, and went downstairs. Lo and behold, there was something the matter with the great clock; and a workman on a pair of steps had taken its face off, and was poking instruments into the works by the light of a candle! This was a great event for Paul, who sat down on the bottom stair, and watched the operation attentively: now and then glancing at the clock face, leaning all askew, against the wall hard by, and feeling a little confused by a suspicion that it was ogling him.

The workman on the steps was very civil; and as he said, when he observed Paul, 'How do you do, Sir?' Paul got into conversation with him, and told him he hadn't been quite well lately. The ice being thus broken, Paul asked him a multitude of questions about chimes and clocks: as, whether people watched up in the lonely church steeples by night to make them strike, and how the bells were rung when people died, and whether those were different bells from wedding bells, or only sounded dismal in the fancies of the living. Finding that his new acquaintance was not very well informed on the subject of the Curfew Bell of ancient days, Paul gave him an account of that institution; and also asked him, as a practical man, what he thought about King Alfred's idea of measuring time by the burning of candles; to which the workman replied, that he thought it would be the ruin of the clock trade if it was to come up again. In fine, Paul looked on, until the clock had quite recovered its familiar aspect, and resumed its sedate inquiry; when the workman, putting

away his tools in a long basket, bade him good day, and went away. Though not before he had whispered something, on the door-mat, to the footman, in which there was the phrase 'old-fashioned' – for Paul heard it.

What could that old fashion be, that seemed to make the people sorry! What could it be!

Having nothing to learn now, he thought of this frequently; though not so often as he might have done, if he had had fewer things to think of. But he had a great many; and was always thinking, all day long.

First, there was Florence coming to the party. Florence would see that the boys were fond of him; and that would make her happy. This was his great theme. Let Florence once be sure that they were gentle and good to him, and that he had become a little favourite among them, and then she would always think of the time he had passed there, without being very sorry. Florence might be all the happier too for that, perhaps, when he came back.

When he came back! Fifty times a day, his noiseless little feet went up the stairs to his own room, as he collected every book, and scrap, and trifle that belonged to him, and put them all together there, down to the minutest thing, for taking home! There was no shade of coming back on little Paul; no preparation for it, or other reference to it, grew out of anything he thought or did, except this slight one in connexion with his sister. On the contrary, he had to think of everything familiar to him, in his

contemplative moods and in his wanderings about the house, as being to be parted with; and hence the many things he had to think of, all day long.

He had to peep into those rooms upstairs, and think how solitary they would be when he was gone, and wonder through how many silent days, weeks, months, and years, they would continue just as grave and undisturbed. He had to think – would any other child (old-fashioned, like himself) stray there at any time, to whom the same grotesque distortions of pattern and furniture would manifest themselves; and would anybody tell that boy of little Dombey, who had been there once?

He had to think of a portrait on the stairs, which always looked earnestly after him as he went away, eyeing it over his shoulder; and which, when he passed it in the company of anyone, still seemed to gaze at him, and not at his companion. He had much to think of, in association with a print that hung up in another place, where, in the centre of a wondering group, one figure that he knew, a figure with a light about its head – benignant, mild, and merciful – stood pointing upward.

At his own bedroom window, there were crowds of thoughts that mixed with these, and came on, one upon another, like the rolling waves. Where those wild birds lived, that were always hovering out at sea in troubled weather; where the clouds rose and first began; whence the wind issued on its rushing flight, and where it stopped; whether the spot where he and Florence had so often sat, and watched, and talked about these things, could

ever be exactly as it used to be without them; whether it could ever be the same to Florence, if he were in some distant place, and she were sitting there alone.

He had to think, too, of Mr Toots, and Mr Feeder, B.A., of all the boys; and of Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber; of home, and of his aunt and Miss Tox; of his father; Dombey and Son, Walter with the poor old Uncle who had got the money he wanted, and that gruff-voiced Captain with the iron hand. Besides all this, he had a number of little visits to pay, in the course of the day; to the schoolroom, to Doctor Blimber's study, to Mrs Blimber's private apartment, to Miss Blimber's, and to the dog. For he was free of the whole house now, to range it as he chose; and, in his desire to part with everybody on affectionate terms, he attended, in his way, to them all. Sometimes he found places in books for Briggs, who was always losing them; sometimes he looked up words in dictionaries for other young gentlemen who were in extremity; sometimes he held skeins of silk for Mrs Blimber to wind; sometimes he put Cornelia's desk to rights; sometimes he would even creep into the Doctor's study, and, sitting on the carpet near his learned feet, turn the globes softly, and go round the world, or take a flight among the far-off stars.

In those days immediately before the holidays, in short, when the other young gentlemen were labouring for dear life through a general resumption of the studies of the whole half-year, Paul was such a privileged pupil as had never been seen in that house

before. He could hardly believe it himself; but his liberty lasted from hour to hour, and from day to day; and little Dombey was caressed by everyone. Doctor Blimber was so particular about him, that he requested Johnson to retire from the dinner-table one day, for having thoughtlessly spoken to him as 'poor little Dombey;' which Paul thought rather hard and severe, though he had flushed at the moment, and wondered why Johnson should pity him. It was the more questionable justice, Paul thought, in the Doctor, from his having certainly overheard that great authority give his assent on the previous evening, to the proposition (stated by Mrs Blimber) that poor dear little Dombey was more old-fashioned than ever. And now it was that Paul began to think it must surely be old-fashioned to be very thin, and light, and easily tired, and soon disposed to lie down anywhere and rest; for he couldn't help feeling that these were more and more his habits every day.

At last the party-day arrived; and Doctor Blimber said at breakfast, 'Gentlemen, we will resume our studies on the twenty-fifth of next month.' Mr Toots immediately threw off his allegiance, and put on his ring: and mentioning the Doctor in casual conversation shortly afterwards, spoke of him as 'Blimber'! This act of freedom inspired the older pupils with admiration and envy; but the younger spirits were appalled, and seemed to marvel that no beam fell down and crushed him.

Not the least allusion was made to the ceremonies of the evening, either at breakfast or at dinner; but there was a bustle

in the house all day, and in the course of his perambulations, Paul made acquaintance with various strange benches and candlesticks, and met a harp in a green greatcoat standing on the landing outside the drawing-room door. There was something queer, too, about Mrs Blimber's head at dinner-time, as if she had screwed her hair up too tight; and though Miss Blimber showed a graceful bunch of plaited hair on each temple, she seemed to have her own little curls in paper underneath, and in a play-bill too; for Paul read 'Theatre Royal' over one of her sparkling spectacles, and 'Brighton' over the other.

There was a grand array of white waistcoats and cravats in the young gentlemen's bedrooms as evening approached; and such a smell of singed hair, that Doctor Blimber sent up the footman with his compliments, and wished to know if the house was on fire. But it was only the hairdresser curling the young gentlemen, and over-heating his tongs in the ardour of business.

When Paul was dressed – which was very soon done, for he felt unwell and drowsy, and was not able to stand about it very long – he went down into the drawing-room; where he found Doctor Blimber pacing up and down the room full dressed, but with a dignified and unconcerned demeanour, as if he thought it barely possible that one or two people might drop in by and by. Shortly afterwards, Mrs Blimber appeared, looking lovely, Paul thought; and attired in such a number of skirts that it was quite an excursion to walk round her. Miss Blimber came down soon after her Mama; a little squeezed in appearance, but very charming.

Mr Toots and Mr Feeder were the next arrivals. Each of these gentlemen brought his hat in his hand, as if he lived somewhere else; and when they were announced by the butler, Doctor Blimber said, 'Ay, ay, ay! God bless my soul!' and seemed extremely glad to see them. Mr Toots was one blaze of jewellery and buttons; and he felt the circumstance so strongly, that when he had shaken hands with the Doctor, and had bowed to Mrs Blimber and Miss Blimber, he took Paul aside, and said, 'What do you think of this, Dombey?'

But notwithstanding this modest confidence in himself, Mr Toots appeared to be involved in a good deal of uncertainty whether, on the whole, it was judicious to button the bottom button of his waistcoat, and whether, on a calm revision of all the circumstances, it was best to wear his waistbands turned up or turned down. Observing that Mr Feeder's were turned up, Mr Toots turned his up; but the waistbands of the next arrival being turned down, Mr Toots turned his down. The differences in point of waistcoat-buttoning, not only at the bottom, but at the top too, became so numerous and complicated as the arrivals thickened, that Mr Toots was continually fingering that article of dress, as if he were performing on some instrument; and appeared to find the incessant execution it demanded, quite bewildering.

All the young gentlemen, tightly cravatted, curled, and pumped, and with their best hats in their hands, having been at different times announced and introduced, Mr Baps, the dancing-master, came, accompanied by Mrs Baps, to whom Mrs

Blimber was extremely kind and condescending. Mr Baps was a very grave gentleman, with a slow and measured manner of speaking; and before he had stood under the lamp five minutes, he began to talk to Toots (who had been silently comparing pumps with him) about what you were to do with your raw materials when they came into your ports in return for your drain of gold. Mr Toots, to whom the question seemed perplexing, suggested 'Cook 'em.' But Mr Baps did not appear to think that would do.

Paul now slipped away from the cushioned corner of a sofa, which had been his post of observation, and went downstairs into the tea-room to be ready for Florence, whom he had not seen for nearly a fortnight, as he had remained at Doctor Blimber's on the previous Saturday and Sunday, lest he should take cold. Presently she came: looking so beautiful in her simple ball dress, with her fresh flowers in her hand, that when she knelt down on the ground to take Paul round the neck and kiss him (for there was no one there, but his friend and another young woman waiting to serve out the tea), he could hardly make up his mind to let her go again, or to take away her bright and loving eyes from his face.

'But what is the matter, Floy?' asked Paul, almost sure that he saw a tear there.

'Nothing, darling; nothing,' returned Florence.

Paul touched her cheek gently with his finger – and it was a tear! 'Why, Floy!' said he.

'We'll go home together, and I'll nurse you, love,' said

Florence.

'Nurse me!' echoed Paul.

Paul couldn't understand what that had to do with it, nor why the two young women looked on so seriously, nor why Florence turned away her face for a moment, and then turned it back, lighted up again with smiles.

'Floy,' said Paul, holding a ringlet of her dark hair in his hand. 'Tell me, dear, Do you think I have grown old-fashioned?'

His sister laughed, and fondled him, and told him 'No.'

'Because I know they say so,' returned Paul, 'and I want to know what they mean, Floy.'

But a loud double knock coming at the door, and Florence hurrying to the table, there was no more said between them. Paul wondered again when he saw his friend whisper to Florence, as if she were comforting her; but a new arrival put that out of his head speedily.

It was Sir Barnet Skettles, Lady Skettles, and Master Skettles. Master Skettles was to be a new boy after the vacation, and Fame had been busy, in Mr Feeder's room, with his father, who was in the House of Commons, and of whom Mr Feeder had said that when he did catch the Speaker's eye (which he had been expected to do for three or four years), it was anticipated that he would rather touch up the Radicals.

'And what room is this now, for instance?' said Lady Skettles to Paul's friend, 'Melia.

'Doctor Blimber's study, Ma'am,' was the reply.

Lady Skettles took a panoramic survey of it through her glass, and said to Sir Barnet Skettles, with a nod of approval, 'Very good.' Sir Barnet assented, but Master Skettles looked suspicious and doubtful.

'And this little creature, now,' said Lady Skettles, turning to Paul. 'Is he one of the – '

'Young gentlemen, Ma'am; yes, Ma'am,' said Paul's friend.

'And what is your name, my pale child?' said Lady Skettles.

'Dombey,' answered Paul.

Sir Barnet Skettles immediately interposed, and said that he had had the honour of meeting Paul's father at a public dinner, and that he hoped he was very well. Then Paul heard him say to Lady Skettles, 'City – very rich – most respectable – Doctor mentioned it.' And then he said to Paul, 'Will you tell your good Papa that Sir Barnet Skettles rejoiced to hear that he was very well, and sent him his best compliments?'

'Yes, Sir,' answered Paul.

'That is my brave boy,' said Sir Barnet Skettles. 'Barnet,' to Master Skettles, who was revenging himself for the studies to come, on the plum-cake, 'this is a young gentleman you ought to know. This is a young gentleman you may know, Barnet,' said Sir Barnet Skettles, with an emphasis on the permission.

'What eyes! What hair! What a lovely face!' exclaimed Lady Skettles softly, as she looked at Florence through her glass.

'My sister,' said Paul, presenting her.

The satisfaction of the Skettleses was now complete. And as

Lady Skettles had conceived, at first sight, a liking for Paul, they all went upstairs together: Sir Barnet Skettles taking care of Florence, and young Barnet following.

Young Barnet did not remain long in the background after they had reached the drawing-room, for Dr Blimber had him out in no time, dancing with Florence. He did not appear to Paul to be particularly happy, or particularly anything but sulky, or to care much what he was about; but as Paul heard Lady Skettles say to Mrs Blimber, while she beat time with her fan, that her dear boy was evidently smitten to death by that angel of a child, Miss Dombey, it would seem that Skettles Junior was in a state of bliss, without showing it.

Little Paul thought it a singular coincidence that nobody had occupied his place among the pillows; and that when he came into the room again, they should all make way for him to go back to it, remembering it was his. Nobody stood before him either, when they observed that he liked to see Florence dancing, but they left the space in front quite clear, so that he might follow her with his eyes. They were so kind, too, even the strangers, of whom there were soon a great many, that they came and spoke to him every now and then, and asked him how he was, and if his head ached, and whether he was tired. He was very much obliged to them for all their kindness and attention, and reclining propped up in his corner, with Mrs Blimber and Lady Skettles on the same sofa, and Florence coming and sitting by his side as soon as every dance was ended, he looked on very happily indeed.

Florence would have sat by him all night, and would not have danced at all of her own accord, but Paul made her, by telling her how much it pleased him. And he told her the truth, too; for his small heart swelled, and his face glowed, when he saw how much they all admired her, and how she was the beautiful little rosebud of the room.

From his nest among the pillows, Paul could see and hear almost everything that passed as if the whole were being done for his amusement. Among other little incidents that he observed, he observed Mr Baps the dancing-master get into conversation with Sir Barnet Skettles, and very soon ask him, as he had asked Mr Toots, what you were to do with your raw materials, when they came into your ports in return for your drain of gold – which was such a mystery to Paul that he was quite desirous to know what ought to be done with them. Sir Barnet Skettles had much to say upon the question, and said it; but it did not appear to solve the question, for Mr Baps retorted, Yes, but supposing Russia stepped in with her tallows; which struck Sir Barnet almost dumb, for he could only shake his head after that, and say, Why then you must fall back upon your cottons, he supposed.

Sir Barnet Skettles looked after Mr Baps when he went to cheer up Mrs Baps (who, being quite deserted, was pretending to look over the music-book of the gentleman who played the harp), as if he thought him a remarkable kind of man; and shortly afterwards he said so in those words to Doctor Blimber, and

inquired if he might take the liberty of asking who he was, and whether he had ever been in the Board of Trade. Doctor Blimber answered no, he believed not; and that in fact he was a Professor of – '

'Of something connected with statistics, I'll swear?' observed Sir Barnet Skettles.

'Why no, Sir Barnet,' replied Doctor Blimber, rubbing his chin. 'No, not exactly.'

'Figures of some sort, I would venture a bet,' said Sir Barnet Skettles.

'Why yes,' said Doctor Blimber, yes, but not of that sort. Mr Baps is a very worthy sort of man, Sir Barnet, and – in fact he's our Professor of dancing.'

Paul was amazed to see that this piece of information quite altered Sir Barnet Skettles's opinion of Mr Baps, and that Sir Barnet flew into a perfect rage, and glowered at Mr Baps over on the other side of the room. He even went so far as to D – Mr Baps to Lady Skettles, in telling her what had happened, and to say that it was like his most con-sum-mate and con-foun-ded impudence.

There was another thing that Paul observed. Mr Feeder, after imbibing several custard-cups of negus, began to enjoy himself. The dancing in general was ceremonious, and the music rather solemn – a little like church music in fact – but after the custard-cups, Mr Feeder told Mr Toots that he was going to throw a little spirit into the thing. After that, Mr Feeder not only began

to dance as if he meant dancing and nothing else, but secretly to stimulate the music to perform wild tunes. Further, he became particular in his attentions to the ladies; and dancing with Miss Blimber, whispered to her – whispered to her! – though not so softly but that Paul heard him say this remarkable poetry,

> 'Had I a heart for falsehood framed,
> I ne'er could injure You!'

This, Paul heard him repeat to four young ladies, in succession. Well might Mr Feeder say to Mr Toots, that he was afraid he should be the worse for it to-morrow!

Mrs Blimber was a little alarmed by this – comparatively speaking – profligate behaviour; and especially by the alteration in the character of the music, which, beginning to comprehend low melodies that were popular in the streets, might not unnaturally be supposed to give offence to Lady Skettles. But Lady Skettles was so very kind as to beg Mrs Blimber not to mention it; and to receive her explanation that Mr Feeder's spirits sometimes betrayed him into excesses on these occasions, with the greatest courtesy and politeness; observing, that he seemed a very nice sort of person for his situation, and that she particularly liked the unassuming style of his hair – which (as already hinted) was about a quarter of an inch long.

Once, when there was a pause in the dancing, Lady Skettles told Paul that he seemed very fond of music. Paul replied, that

he was; and if she was too, she ought to hear his sister, Florence, sing. Lady Skettles presently discovered that she was dying with anxiety to have that gratification; and though Florence was at first very much frightened at being asked to sing before so many people, and begged earnestly to be excused, yet, on Paul calling her to him, and saying, 'Do, Floy! Please! For me, my dear!' she went straight to the piano, and began. When they all drew a little away, that Paul might see her; and when he saw her sitting there all alone, so young, and good, and beautiful, and kind to him; and heard her thrilling voice, so natural and sweet, and such a golden link between him and all his life's love and happiness, rising out of the silence; he turned his face away, and hid his tears. Not, as he told them when they spoke to him, not that the music was too plaintive or too sorrowful, but it was so dear to him.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.