

Chapter XXXIX

The applause which the performance of Hugh and his new friend elicited from the company at The Boot, had not yet subsided, and the two dancers were still panting from their exertions, which had been of a rather extreme and violent character, when the party was reinforced by the arrival of some more guests, who, being a detachment of United Bulldogs, were received with very flattering marks of distinction and respect.

The leader of this small party - for, including himself, they were but three in number - was our old acquaintance, Mr Tappertit, who seemed, physically speaking, to have grown smaller with years (particularly as to his legs, which were stupendously little), but who, in a moral point of view, in personal dignity and self-esteem, had swelled into a giant. Nor was it by any means difficult for the most unobservant person to detect this state of feeling in the quondam 'prentice, for it not only proclaimed itself impressively and beyond mistake in his majestic walk and kindling eye, but found a striking means of revelation in his turned-up nose, which scouted all things of earth with deep disdain, and sought communion with its kindred skies.

Mr Tappertit, as chief or captain of the Bulldogs, was attended by his two lieutenants; one, the tall comrade of his younger life; the other, a 'Prentice Knight in days of yore - Mark Gilbert, bound in the olden time to Thomas Curzon of the Golden Fleece. These gentlemen, like himself, were now emancipated from their 'prentice thralldom, and served as journeymen; but they were, in humble emulation of his great example, bold and daring spirits, and aspired to a distinguished state in great political events. Hence their connection with the Protestant Association of England, sanctioned by the name of Lord George Gordon; and hence their present visit to The Boot.

'Gentlemen!' said Mr Tappertit, taking off his hat as a great general might in addressing his troops. 'Well met. My lord does me and you the honour to send his compliments per self.'

'You've seen my lord too, have you?' said Dennis. 'I see him this afternoon.'

'My duty called me to the Lobby when our shop shut up; and I saw him there, sir,' Mr Tappertit replied, as he and his lieutenants took their seats. 'How do YOU do?'

'Lively, master, lively,' said the fellow. 'Here's a new brother, regularly put down in black and white by Muster Gashford; a credit to the cause; one of the stick-at-nothing sort; one arter my own heart. D'ye

see him? Has he got the looks of a man that'll do, do you think?' he cried, as he slapped Hugh on the back.

'Looks or no looks,' said Hugh, with a drunken flourish of his arm, 'I'm the man you want. I hate the Papists, every one of 'em. They hate me and I hate them. They do me all the harm they can, and I'll do them all the harm I can. Hurrah!'

'Was there ever,' said Dennis, looking round the room, when the echo of his boisterous voice had died away; 'was there ever such a game boy! Why, I mean to say, brothers, that if Muster Gashford had gone a hundred mile and got together fifty men of the common run, they wouldn't have been worth this one.'

The greater part of the company implicitly subscribed to this opinion, and testified their faith in Hugh by nods and looks of great significance. Mr Tappertit sat and contemplated him for a long time in silence, as if he suspended his judgment; then drew a little nearer to him, and eyed him over more carefully; then went close up to him, and took him apart into a dark corner.

'I say,' he began, with a thoughtful brow, 'haven't I seen you before?'

'It's like you may,' said Hugh, in his careless way. 'I don't know; shouldn't wonder.'

'No, but it's very easily settled,' returned Sim. 'Look at me. Did you ever see ME before? You wouldn't be likely to forget it, you know, if you ever did. Look at me. Don't be afraid; I won't do you any harm. Take a good look - steady now.'

The encouraging way in which Mr Tappertit made this request, and coupled it with an assurance that he needn't be frightened, amused Hugh mightily - so much indeed, that he saw nothing at all of the small man before him, through closing his eyes in a fit of hearty laughter, which shook his great broad sides until they ached again.

'Come!' said Mr Tappertit, growing a little impatient under this disrespectful treatment. 'Do you know me, feller?'

'Not I,' cried Hugh. 'Ha ha ha! Not I! But I should like to.'

'And yet I'd have wagered a seven-shilling piece,' said Mr Tappertit, folding his arms, and confronting him with his legs wide apart and firmly planted on the ground, 'that you once were hostler at the Maypole.'

Hugh opened his eyes on hearing this, and looked at him in great surprise.

' - And so you were, too,' said Mr Tappertit, pushing him away with a condescending playfulness. 'When did MY eyes ever deceive - unless it was a young woman! Don't you know me now?'

'Why it an't - ' Hugh faltered.

'An't it?' said Mr Tappertit. 'Are you sure of that? You remember G. Varden, don't you?'

Certainly Hugh did, and he remembered D. Varden too; but that he didn't tell him.

'You remember coming down there, before I was out of my time, to ask after a vagabond that had bolted off, and left his disconsolate father a prey to the bitterest emotions, and all the rest of it - don't you?' said Mr Tappertit.

'Of course I do!' cried Hugh. 'And I saw you there.'

'Saw me there!' said Mr Tappertit. 'Yes, I should think you did see me there. The place would be troubled to go on without me. Don't you remember my thinking you liked the vagabond, and on that account going to quarrel with you; and then finding you detested him worse than poison, going to drink with you? Don't you remember that?'

'To be sure!' cried Hugh.

'Well! and are you in the same mind now?' said Mr Tappertit.

'Yes!' roared Hugh.

'You speak like a man,' said Mr Tappertit, 'and I'll shake hands with you.' With these conciliatory expressions he suited the action to the word; and Hugh meeting his advances readily, they performed the ceremony with a show of great heartiness.

'I find,' said Mr Tappertit, looking round on the assembled guests, 'that brother What's-his-name and I are old acquaintance. - You never heard anything more of that rascal, I suppose, eh?'

'Not a syllable,' replied Hugh. 'I never want to. I don't believe I ever shall. He's dead long ago, I hope.'

'It's to be hoped, for the sake of mankind in general and the happiness of society, that he is,' said Mr Tappertit, rubbing his palm upon his

legs, and looking at it between whiles. 'Is your other hand at all cleaner? Much the same. Well, I'll owe you another shake. We'll suppose it done, if you've no objection.'

Hugh laughed again, and with such thorough abandonment to his mad humour, that his limbs seemed dislocated, and his whole frame in danger of tumbling to pieces; but Mr Tappertit, so far from receiving this extreme merriment with any irritation, was pleased to regard it with the utmost favour, and even to join in it, so far as one of his gravity and station could, with any regard to that decency and decorum which men in high places are expected to maintain.

Mr Tappertit did not stop here, as many public characters might have done, but calling up his brace of lieutenants, introduced Hugh to them with high commendation; declaring him to be a man who, at such times as those in which they lived, could not be too much cherished. Further, he did him the honour to remark, that he would be an acquisition of which even the United Bulldogs might be proud; and finding, upon sounding him, that he was quite ready and willing to enter the society (for he was not at all particular, and would have leagued himself that night with anything, or anybody, for any purpose whatsoever), caused the necessary preliminaries to be gone into upon the spot. This tribute to his great merit delighted no man more than Mr Dennis, as he himself proclaimed with several rare and surprising oaths; and indeed it gave unmingled satisfaction to the whole assembly.

'Make anything you like of me!' cried Hugh, flourishing the can he had emptied more than once. 'Put me on any duty you please. I'm your man. I'll do it. Here's my captain - here's my leader. Ha ha ha! Let him give me the word of command, and I'll fight the whole Parliament House single-handed, or set a lighted torch to the King's Throne itself!' With that, he smote Mr Tappertit on the back, with such violence that his little body seemed to shrink into a mere nothing; and roared again until the very foundlings near at hand were startled in their beds.

In fact, a sense of something whimsical in their companionship seemed to have taken entire possession of his rude brain. The bare fact of being patronised by a great man whom he could have crushed with one hand, appeared in his eyes so eccentric and humorous, that a kind of ferocious merriment gained the mastery over him, and quite subdued his brutal nature. He roared and roared again; toasted Mr Tappertit a hundred times; declared himself a Bulldog to the core; and vowed to be faithful to him to the last drop of blood in his veins.

All these compliments Mr Tappertit received as matters of course - flattering enough in their way, but entirely attributable to his vast superiority. His dignified self-possession only delighted Hugh the

more; and in a word, this giant and dwarf struck up a friendship which bade fair to be of long continuance, as the one held it to be his right to command, and the other considered it an exquisite pleasantry to obey. Nor was Hugh by any means a passive follower, who scrupled to act without precise and definite orders; for when Mr Tappertit mounted on an empty cask which stood by way of rostrum in the room, and volunteered a speech upon the alarming crisis then at hand, he placed himself beside the orator, and though he grinned from ear to ear at every word he said, threw out such expressive hints to scoffers in the management of his cudgel, that those who were at first the most disposed to interrupt, became remarkably attentive, and were the loudest in their approbation.

It was not all noise and jest, however, at The Boot, nor were the whole party listeners to the speech. There were some men at the other end of the room (which was a long, low-roofed chamber) in earnest conversation all the time; and when any of this group went out, fresh people were sure to come in soon afterwards and sit down in their places, as though the others had relieved them on some watch or duty; which it was pretty clear they did, for these changes took place by the clock, at intervals of half an hour. These persons whispered very much among themselves, and kept aloof, and often looked round, as jealous of their speech being overheard; some two or three among them entered in books what seemed to be reports from the others; when they were not thus employed one of them would turn to the newspapers which were strewn upon the table, and from the St James's Chronicle, the Herald, Chronicle, or Public Advertiser, would read to the rest in a low voice some passage having reference to the topic in which they were all so deeply interested. But the great attraction was a pamphlet called The Thunderer, which espoused their own opinions, and was supposed at that time to emanate directly from the Association. This was always in request; and whether read aloud, to an eager knot of listeners, or by some solitary man, was certain to be followed by stormy talking and excited looks.

In the midst of all his merriment, and admiration of his captain, Hugh was made sensible by these and other tokens, of the presence of an air of mystery, akin to that which had so much impressed him out of doors. It was impossible to discard a sense that something serious was going on, and that under the noisy revel of the public-house, there lurked unseen and dangerous matter. Little affected by this, however, he was perfectly satisfied with his quarters and would have remained there till morning, but that his conductor rose soon after midnight, to go home; Mr Tappertit following his example, left him no excuse to stay. So they all three left the house together: roaring a No-Popery song until the fields resounded with the dismal noise.

Cheer up, captain!' cried Hugh, when they had roared themselves out of breath. 'Another stave!'

Mr Tappertit, nothing loath, began again; and so the three went staggering on, arm-in-arm, shouting like madmen, and defying the watch with great valour. Indeed this did not require any unusual bravery or boldness, as the watchmen of that time, being selected for the office on account of excessive age and extraordinary infirmity, had a custom of shutting themselves up tight in their boxes on the first symptoms of disturbance, and remaining there until they disappeared. In these proceedings, Mr Dennis, who had a gruff voice and lungs of considerable power, distinguished himself very much, and acquired great credit with his two companions.

'What a queer fellow you are!' said Mr Tappertit. 'You're so precious sly and close. Why don't you ever tell what trade you're of?'

'Answer the captain instantly,' cried Hugh, beating his hat down on his head; 'why don't you ever tell what trade you're of?'

'I'm of as gen-teel a calling, brother, as any man in England - as light a business as any gentleman could desire.'

'Was you 'prenticed to it?' asked Mr Tappertit.

'No. Natural genius,' said Mr Dennis. 'No 'prenticing. It come by natur'. Muster Gashford knows my calling. Look at that hand of mine - many and many a job that hand has done, with a neatness and dexterity, never known afore. When I look at that hand,' said Mr Dennis, shaking it in the air, 'and remember the helegant bits of work it has turned off, I feel quite molloncholy to think it should ever grow old and feeble. But sich is life!'

He heaved a deep sigh as he indulged in these reflections, and putting his fingers with an absent air on Hugh's throat, and particularly under his left ear, as if he were studying the anatomical development of that part of his frame, shook his head in a despondent manner and actually shed tears.

'You're a kind of artist, I suppose - eh!' said Mr Tappertit.

'Yes,' rejoined Dennis; 'yes - I may call myself a artist - a fancy workman - art improves natur' - that's my motto.'

'And what do you call this?' said Mr Tappertit taking his stick out of his hand.

'That's my portrait atop,' Dennis replied; 'd'ye think it's like?'

'Why - it's a little too handsome,' said Mr Tappertit. 'Who did it? You?'

'I!' repeated Dennis, gazing fondly on his image. 'I wish I had the talent. That was carved by a friend of mine, as is now no more. The very day afore he died, he cut that with his pocket-knife from memory! 'I'll die game,' says my friend, 'and my last moments shall be dewoted to making Dennis's picter.' That's it.'

'That was a queer fancy, wasn't it?' said Mr Tappertit.

'It WAS a queer fancy,' rejoined the other, breathing on his fictitious nose, and polishing it with the cuff of his coat, 'but he was a queer subject altogether - a kind of gipsy - one of the finest, stand-up men, you ever see. Ah! He told me some things that would startle you a bit, did that friend of mine, on the morning when he died.'

'You were with him at the time, were you?' said Mr Tappertit.

'Yes,' he answered with a curious look, 'I was there. Oh! yes certainly, I was there. He wouldn't have gone off half as comfortable without me. I had been with three or four of his family under the same circumstances. They were all fine fellows.'

'They must have been fond of you,' remarked Mr Tappertit, looking at him sideways.

'I don't know that they was exactly fond of me,' said Dennis, with a little hesitation, 'but they all had me near 'em when they departed. I come in for their wardrobes too. This very handkecher that you see round my neck, belonged to him that I've been speaking of - him as did that likeness.'

Mr Tappertit glanced at the article referred to, and appeared to think that the deceased's ideas of dress were of a peculiar and by no means an expensive kind. He made no remark upon the point, however, and suffered his mysterious companion to proceed without interruption.

'These smalls,' said Dennis, rubbing his legs; 'these very smalls - they belonged to a friend of mine that's left off sich incumbrances for ever: this coat too - I've often walked behind this coat, in the street, and wondered whether it would ever come to me: this pair of shoes have danced a hornpipe for another man, afore my eyes, full half-a-dozen times at least: and as to my hat,' he said, taking it off, and whirling it round upon his fist - 'Lord! I've seen this hat go up Holborn on the box of a hackney-coach - ah, many and many a day!'

'You don't mean to say their old wearers are ALL dead, I hope?' said Mr Tappertit, falling a little distance from him as he spoke.

'Every one of 'em,' replied Dennis. 'Every man Jack!'

There was something so very ghastly in this circumstance, and it appeared to account, in such a very strange and dismal manner, for his faded dress - which, in this new aspect, seemed discoloured by the earth from graves - that Mr Tappertit abruptly found he was going another way, and, stopping short, bade him good night with the utmost heartiness. As they happened to be near the Old Bailey, and Mr Dennis knew there were turnkeys in the lodge with whom he could pass the night, and discuss professional subjects of common interest among them before a rousing fire, and over a social glass, he separated from his companions without any great regret, and warmly shaking hands with Hugh, and making an early appointment for their meeting at The Boot, left them to pursue their road.

'That's a strange sort of man,' said Mr Tappertit, watching the hackney-coachman's hat as it went bobbing down the street. 'I don't know what to make of him. Why can't he have his smalls made to order, or wear live clothes at any rate?'

'He's a lucky man, captain,' cried Hugh. 'I should like to have such friends as his.'

'I hope he don't get 'em to make their wills, and then knock 'em on the head,' said Mr Tappertit, musing. 'But come. The United B.'s expect me. On! - What's the matter?'

'I quite forgot,' said Hugh, who had started at the striking of a neighbouring clock. 'I have somebody to see to-night - I must turn back directly. The drinking and singing put it out of my head. It's well I remembered it!'

Mr Tappertit looked at him as though he were about to give utterance to some very majestic sentiments in reference to this act of desertion, but as it was clear, from Hugh's hasty manner, that the engagement was one of a pressing nature, he graciously forbore, and gave him his permission to depart immediately, which Hugh acknowledged with a roar of laughter.

'Good night, captain!' he cried. 'I am yours to the death, remember!'

'Farewell!' said Mr Tappertit, waving his hand. 'Be bold and vigilant!'

'No Popery, captain!' roared Hugh.

'England in blood first!' cried his desperate leader. Whereat Hugh cheered and laughed, and ran off like a greyhound.

'That man will prove a credit to my corps,' said Simon, turning thoughtfully upon his heel. 'And let me see. In an altered state of society - which must ensue if we break out and are victorious - when the locksmith's child is mine, Miggs must be got rid of somehow, or she'll poison the tea-kettle one evening when I'm out. He might marry Miggs, if he was drunk enough. It shall be done. I'll make a note of it.'