

Chapter L

They were among the first to reach the tavern, but they had not been there many minutes, when several groups of men who had formed part of the crowd, came straggling in. Among them were Simon Tappertit and Mr Dennis; both of whom, but especially the latter, greeted Barnaby with the utmost warmth, and paid him many compliments on the prowess he had shown.

'Which,' said Dennis, with an oath, as he rested his bludgeon in a corner with his hat upon it, and took his seat at the same table with them, 'it does me good to think of. There was a opportunity! But it led to nothing. For my part, I don't know what would. There's no spirit among the people in these here times. Bring something to eat and drink here. I'm disgusted with humanity.'

'On what account?' asked Mr Tappertit, who had been quenching his fiery face in a half-gallon can. 'Don't you consider this a good beginning, mister?'

'Give me security that it an't a ending,' rejoined the hangman. 'When that soldier went down, we might have made London ours; but no; - we stand, and gape, and look on - the justice (I wish he had had a bullet in each eye, as he would have had, if we'd gone to work my way) says, 'My lads, if you'll give me your word to disperse, I'll order off the military,' our people sets up a hurrah, throws up the game with the winning cards in their hands, and skulks away like a pack of tame curs as they are. Ah,' said the hangman, in a tone of deep disgust, 'it makes me blush for my feller creeturs. I wish I had been born a ox, I do!'

'You'd have been quite as agreeable a character if you had been, I think,' returned Simon Tappertit, going out in a lofty manner.

'Don't be too sure of that,' rejoined the hangman, calling after him; 'if I was a horned animal at the present moment, with the smallest grain of sense, I'd toss every man in this company, excepting them two,' meaning Hugh and Barnaby, 'for his manner of conducting himself this day.' With which mournful review of their proceedings, Mr Dennis sought consolation in cold boiled beef and beer; but without at all relaxing the grim and dissatisfied expression of his face, the gloom of which was rather deepened than dissipated by their grateful influence.

The company who were thus libelled might have retaliated by strong words, if not by blows, but they were dispirited and worn out. The greater part of them had fasted since morning; all had suffered extremely from the excessive heat; and between the day's shouting, exertion, and excitement, many had quite lost their voices, and so

much of their strength that they could hardly stand. Then they were uncertain what to do next, fearful of the consequences of what they had done already, and sensible that after all they had carried no point, but had indeed left matters worse than they had found them. Of those who had come to The Boot, many dropped off within an hour; such of them as were really honest and sincere, never, after the morning's experience, to return, or to hold any communication with their late companions. Others remained but to refresh themselves, and then went home desponding; others who had theretofore been regular in their attendance, avoided the place altogether. The half-dozen prisoners whom the Guards had taken, were magnified by report into half-a-hundred at least; and their friends, being faint and sober, so slackened in their energy, and so drooped beneath these dispiriting influences, that by eight o'clock in the evening, Dennis, Hugh, and Barnaby, were left alone. Even they were fast asleep upon the benches, when Gashford's entrance roused them.

'Oh! you ARE here then?' said the Secretary. 'Dear me!'

'Why, where should we be, Muster Gashford!' Dennis rejoined as he rose into a sitting posture.

'Oh nowhere, nowhere,' he returned with excessive mildness. 'The streets are filled with blue cockades. I rather thought you might have been among them. I am glad you are not.'

'You have orders for us, master, then?' said Hugh.

'Oh dear, no. Not I. No orders, my good fellow. What orders should I have? You are not in my service.'

'Muster Gashford,' remonstrated Dennis, 'we belong to the cause, don't we?'

'The cause!' repeated the secretary, looking at him in a sort of abstraction. 'There is no cause. The cause is lost.'

'Lost!'

'Oh yes. You have heard, I suppose? The petition is rejected by a hundred and ninety-two, to six. It's quite final. We might have spared ourselves some trouble. That, and my lord's vexation, are the only circumstances I regret. I am quite satisfied in all other respects.'

As he said this, he took a penknife from his pocket, and putting his hat upon his knee, began to busy himself in ripping off the blue cockade which he had worn all day; at the same time humming a

psalm tune which had been very popular in the morning, and dwelling on it with a gentle regret.

His two adherents looked at each other, and at him, as if they were at a loss how to pursue the subject. At length Hugh, after some elbowing and winking between himself and Mr Dennis, ventured to stay his hand, and to ask him why he meddled with that riband in his hat.

'Because,' said the secretary, looking up with something between a snarl and a smile; 'because to sit still and wear it, or to fall asleep and wear it, is a mockery. That's all, friend.'

'What would you have us do, master!' cried Hugh.

'Nothing,' returned Gashford, shrugging his shoulders, 'nothing. When my lord was reproached and threatened for standing by you, I, as a prudent man, would have had you do nothing. When the soldiers were trampling you under their horses' feet, I would have had you do nothing. When one of them was struck down by a daring hand, and I saw confusion and dismay in all their faces, I would have had you do nothing - just what you did, in short. This is the young man who had so little prudence and so much boldness. Ah! I am sorry for him.'

'Sorry, master!' cried Hugh.

'Sorry, Muster Gashford!' echoed Dennis.

'In case there should be a proclamation out to-morrow, offering five hundred pounds, or some such trifle, for his apprehension; and in case it should include another man who dropped into the lobby from the stairs above,' said Gashford, coldly; 'still, do nothing.'

'Fire and fury, master!' cried Hugh, starting up. 'What have we done, that you should talk to us like this!'

'Nothing,' returned Gashford with a sneer. 'If you are cast into prison; if the young man - ' here he looked hard at Barnaby's attentive face - 'is dragged from us and from his friends; perhaps from people whom he loves, and whom his death would kill; is thrown into jail, brought out and hanged before their eyes; still, do nothing. You'll find it your best policy, I have no doubt.'

'Come on!' cried Hugh, striding towards the door. 'Dennis - Barnaby - come on!'

'Where? To do what?' said Gashford, slipping past him, and standing with his back against it.

'Anywhere! Anything!' cried Hugh. 'Stand aside, master, or the window will serve our turn as well. Let us out!'

'Ha ha ha! You are of such - of such an impetuous nature,' said Gashford, changing his manner for one of the utmost good fellowship and the pleasantest raillery; 'you are such an excitable creature - but you'll drink with me before you go?'

'Oh, yes - certainly,' growled Dennis, drawing his sleeve across his thirsty lips. 'No malice, brother. Drink with Muster Gashford!'

Hugh wiped his heated brow, and relaxed into a smile. The artful secretary laughed outright.

'Some liquor here! Be quick, or he'll not stop, even for that. He is a man of such desperate ardour!' said the smooth secretary, whom Mr Dennis corroborated with sundry nods and muttered oaths - 'Once roused, he is a fellow of such fierce determination!'

Hugh poised his sturdy arm aloft, and clapping Barnaby on the back, bade him fear nothing. They shook hands together - poor Barnaby evidently possessed with the idea that he was among the most virtuous and disinterested heroes in the world - and Gashford laughed again.

'I hear,' he said smoothly, as he stood among them with a great measure of liquor in his hand, and filled their glasses as quickly and as often as they chose, 'I hear - but I cannot say whether it be true or false - that the men who are loitering in the streets to-night are half disposed to pull down a Romish chapel or two, and that they only want leaders. I even heard mention of those in Duke Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and in Warwick Street, Golden Square; but common report, you know - You are not going?'

- 'To do nothing, master, eh?' cried Hugh. 'No jails and halter for Barnaby and me. They must be frightened out of that. Leaders are wanted, are they? Now boys!'

'A most impetuous fellow!' cried the secretary. 'Ha ha! A courageous, boisterous, most vehement fellow! A man who - '

There was no need to finish the sentence, for they had rushed out of the house, and were far beyond hearing. He stopped in the middle of a laugh, listened, drew on his gloves, and, clasping his hands behind him, paced the deserted room for a long time, then bent his steps towards the busy town, and walked into the streets.

They were filled with people, for the rumour of that day's proceedings had made a great noise. Those persons who did not care to leave home, were at their doors or windows, and one topic of discourse prevailed on every side. Some reported that the riots were effectually put down; others that they had broken out again: some said that Lord George Gordon had been sent under a strong guard to the Tower; others that an attempt had been made upon the King's life, that the soldiers had been again called out, and that the noise of musketry in a distant part of the town had been plainly heard within an hour. As it grew darker, these stories became more direful and mysterious; and often, when some frightened passenger ran past with tidings that the rioters were not far off, and were coming up, the doors were shut and barred, lower windows made secure, and as much consternation engendered, as if the city were invaded by a foreign army.

Gashford walked stealthily about, listening to all he heard, and diffusing or confirming, whenever he had an opportunity, such false intelligence as suited his own purpose; and, busily occupied in this way, turned into Holborn for the twentieth time, when a great many women and children came flying along the street - often panting and looking back - and the confused murmur of numerous voices struck upon his ear. Assured by these tokens, and by the red light which began to flash upon the houses on either side, that some of his friends were indeed approaching, he begged a moment's shelter at a door which opened as he passed, and running with some other persons to an upper window, looked out upon the crowd.

They had torches among them, and the chief faces were distinctly visible. That they had been engaged in the destruction of some building was sufficiently apparent, and that it was a Catholic place of worship was evident from the spoils they bore as trophies, which were easily recognisable for the vestments of priests, and rich fragments of altar furniture. Covered with soot, and dirt, and dust, and lime; their garments torn to rags; their hair hanging wildly about them; their hands and faces jagged and bleeding with the wounds of rusty nails; Barnaby, Hugh, and Dennis hurried on before them all, like hideous madmen. After them, the dense throng came fighting on: some singing; some shouting in triumph; some quarrelling among themselves; some menacing the spectators as they passed; some with great wooden fragments, on which they spent their rage as if they had been alive, rending them limb from limb, and hurling the scattered morsels high into the air; some in a drunken state, unconscious of the hurts they had received from falling bricks, and stones, and beams; one borne upon a shutter, in the very midst, covered with a dingy cloth, a senseless, ghastly heap. Thus - a vision of coarse faces, with here and there a blot of flaring, smoky light; a dream of demon heads and savage eyes, and sticks and iron bars uplifted in the air, and whirled about; a bewildering horror, in which so much was seen, and

yet so little, which seemed so long, and yet so short, in which there were so many phantoms, not to be forgotten all through life, and yet so many things that could not be observed in one distracting glimpse - it flitted onward, and was gone.

As it passed away upon its work of wrath and ruin, a piercing scream was heard. A knot of persons ran towards the spot; Gashford, who just then emerged into the street, among them. He was on the outskirts of the little concourse, and could not see or hear what passed within; but one who had a better place, informed him that a widow woman had descried her son among the rioters.

'Is that all?' said the secretary, turning his face homewards. 'Well! I think this looks a little more like business!'