

Chapter LII

A mob is usually a creature of very mysterious existence, particularly in a large city. Where it comes from or whither it goes, few men can tell. Assembling and dispersing with equal suddenness, it is as difficult to follow to its various sources as the sea itself; nor does the parallel stop here, for the ocean is not more fickle and uncertain, more terrible when roused, more unreasonable, or more cruel.

The people who were boisterous at Westminster upon the Friday morning, and were eagerly bent upon the work of devastation in Duke Street and Warwick Street at night, were, in the mass, the same. Allowing for the chance accessions of which any crowd is morally sure in a town where there must always be a large number of idle and profligate persons, one and the same mob was at both places. Yet they spread themselves in various directions when they dispersed in the afternoon, made no appointment for reassembling, had no definite purpose or design, and indeed, for anything they knew, were scattered beyond the hope of future union.

At The Boot, which, as has been shown, was in a manner the headquarters of the rioters, there were not, upon this Friday night, a dozen people. Some slept in the stable and outhouses, some in the common room, some two or three in beds. The rest were in their usual homes or haunts. Perhaps not a score in all lay in the adjacent fields and lanes, and under haystacks, or near the warmth of brick-kilns, who had not their accustomed place of rest beneath the open sky. As to the public ways within the town, they had their ordinary nightly occupants, and no others; the usual amount of vice and wretchedness, but no more.

The experience of one evening, however, had taught the reckless leaders of disturbance, that they had but to show themselves in the streets, to be immediately surrounded by materials which they could only have kept together when their aid was not required, at great risk, expense, and trouble. Once possessed of this secret, they were as confident as if twenty thousand men, devoted to their will, had been encamped about them, and assumed a confidence which could not have been surpassed, though that had really been the case. All day, Saturday, they remained quiet. On Sunday, they rather studied how to keep their men within call, and in full hope, than to follow out, by any fierce measure, their first day's proceedings.

'I hope,' said Dennis, as, with a loud yawn, he raised his body from a heap of straw on which he had been sleeping, and supporting his head upon his hand, appealed to Hugh on Sunday morning, 'that Muster Gashford allows some rest? Perhaps he'd have us at work again already, eh?'

'It's not his way to let matters drop, you may be sure of that,' growled Hugh in answer. 'I'm in no humour to stir yet, though. I'm as stiff as a dead body, and as full of ugly scratches as if I had been fighting all day yesterday with wild cats.'

'You've so much enthusiasm, that's it,' said Dennis, looking with great admiration at the uncombed head, matted beard, and torn hands and face of the wild figure before him; 'you're such a devil of a fellow. You hurt yourself a hundred times more than you need, because you will be foremost in everything, and will do more than the rest.'

'For the matter of that,' returned Hugh, shaking back his ragged hair and glancing towards the door of the stable in which they lay; 'there's one yonder as good as me. What did I tell you about him? Did I say he was worth a dozen, when you doubted him?'

Mr Dennis rolled lazily over upon his breast, and resting his chin upon his hand in imitation of the attitude in which Hugh lay, said, as he too looked towards the door:

'Ay, ay, you knew him, brother, you knew him. But who'd suppose to look at that chap now, that he could be the man he is! Isn't it a thousand cruel pities, brother, that instead of taking his nat'ral rest and qualifying himself for further exertions in this here honourable cause, he should be playing at soldiers like a boy? And his cleanliness too!' said Mr Dennis, who certainly had no reason to entertain a fellow feeling with anybody who was particular on that score; 'what weaknesses he's guilty of; with respect to his cleanliness! At five o'clock this morning, there he was at the pump, though any one would think he had gone through enough, the day before yesterday, to be pretty fast asleep at that time. But no - when I woke for a minute or two, there he was at the pump, and if you'd seen him sticking them peacock's feathers into his hat when he'd done washing - ah! I'm sorry he's such a imperfect character, but the best on us is incomplete in some pint of view or another.'

The subject of this dialogue and of these concluding remarks, which were uttered in a tone of philosophical meditation, was, as the reader will have divined, no other than Barnaby, who, with his flag in hand, stood sentry in the little patch of sunlight at the distant door, or walked to and fro outside, singing softly to himself; and keeping time to the music of some clear church bells. Whether he stood still, leaning with both hands on the flagstaff, or, bearing it upon his shoulder, paced slowly up and down, the careful arrangement of his poor dress, and his erect and lofty bearing, showed how high a sense he had of the great importance of his trust, and how happy and how proud it made him. To Hugh and his companion, who lay in a dark corner of the gloomy shed, he, and the sunlight, and the peaceful

Sabbath sound to which he made response, seemed like a bright picture framed by the door, and set off by the stable's blackness. The whole formed such a contrast to themselves, as they lay wallowing, like some obscene animals, in their squalor and wickedness on the two heaps of straw, that for a few moments they looked on without speaking, and felt almost ashamed.

'Ah!' said Hugh at length, carrying it off with a laugh: 'He's a rare fellow is Barnaby, and can do more, with less rest, or meat, or drink, than any of us. As to his soldiering, I put him on duty there.'

'Then there was a object in it, and a proper good one too, I'll be sworn,' retorted Dennis with a broad grin, and an oath of the same quality. 'What was it, brother?'

'Why, you see,' said Hugh, crawling a little nearer to him, 'that our noble captain yonder, came in yesterday morning rather the worse for liquor, and was - like you and me - ditto last night.'

Dennis looked to where Simon Tappertit lay coiled upon a truss of hay, snoring profoundly, and nodded.

'And our noble captain,' continued Hugh with another laugh, 'our noble captain and I, have planned for to-morrow a roaring expedition, with good profit in it.'

'Again the Papists?' asked Dennis, rubbing his hands.

'Ay, against the Papists - against one of 'em at least, that some of us, and I for one, owe a good heavy grudge to.'

'Not Muster Gashford's friend that he spoke to us about in my house, eh?' said Dennis, brimfull of pleasant expectation.

'The same man,' said Hugh.

'That's your sort,' cried Mr Dennis, gaily shaking hands with him, 'that's the kind of game. Let's have revenges and injuries, and all that, and we shall get on twice as fast. Now you talk, indeed!'

'Ha ha ha! The captain,' added Hugh, 'has thoughts of carrying off a woman in the bustle, and - ha ha ha! - and so have I!'

Mr Dennis received this part of the scheme with a wry face, observing that as a general principle he objected to women altogether, as being unsafe and slippery persons on whom there was no calculating with any certainty, and who were never in the same mind for four-and-twenty hours at a stretch. He might have expatiated on this suggestive

theme at much greater length, but that it occurred to him to ask what connection existed between the proposed expedition and Barnaby's being posted at the stable-door as sentry; to which Hugh cautiously replied in these words:

'Why, the people we mean to visit, were friends of his, once upon a time, and I know that much of him to feel pretty sure that if he thought we were going to do them any harm, he'd be no friend to our side, but would lend a ready hand to the other. So I've persuaded him (for I know him of old) that Lord George has picked him out to guard this place to-morrow while we're away, and that it's a great honour - and so he's on duty now, and as proud of it as if he was a general. Ha ha! What do you say to me for a careful man as well as a devil of a one?'

Mr Dennis exhausted himself in compliments, and then added,

'But about the expedition itself - '

'About that,' said Hugh, 'you shall hear all particulars from me and the great captain conjointly and both together - for see, he's waking up. Rouse yourself, lion-heart. Ha ha! Put a good face upon it, and drink again. Another hair of the dog that bit you, captain! Call for drink! There's enough of gold and silver cups and candlesticks buried underneath my bed,' he added, rolling back the straw, and pointing to where the ground was newly turned, 'to pay for it, if it was a score of casks full. Drink, captain!'

Mr Tappertit received these jovial promptings with a very bad grace, being much the worse, both in mind and body, for his two nights of debauch, and but indifferently able to stand upon his legs. With Hugh's assistance, however, he contrived to stagger to the pump; and having refreshed himself with an abundant draught of cold water, and a copious shower of the same refreshing liquid on his head and face, he ordered some rum and milk to be served; and upon that innocent beverage and some biscuits and cheese made a pretty hearty meal. That done, he disposed himself in an easy attitude on the ground beside his two companions (who were carousing after their own tastes), and proceeded to enlighten Mr Dennis in reference to to-morrow's project.

That their conversation was an interesting one, was rendered manifest by its length, and by the close attention of all three. That it was not of an oppressively grave character, but was enlivened by various pleasantries arising out of the subject, was clear from their loud and frequent roars of laughter, which startled Barnaby on his post, and made him wonder at their levity. But he was not summoned to join them, until they had eaten, and drunk, and slept, and talked together

for some hours; not, indeed, until the twilight; when they informed him that they were about to make a slight demonstration in the streets - just to keep the people's hands in, as it was Sunday night, and the public might otherwise be disappointed - and that he was free to accompany them if he would.

Without the slightest preparation, saving that they carried clubs and wore the blue cockade, they sallied out into the streets; and, with no more settled design than that of doing as much mischief as they could, paraded them at random. Their numbers rapidly increasing, they soon divided into parties; and agreeing to meet by-and-by, in the fields near Welbeck Street, scoured the town in various directions. The largest body, and that which augmented with the greatest rapidity, was the one to which Hugh and Barnaby belonged. This took its way towards Moorfields, where there was a rich chapel, and in which neighbourhood several Catholic families were known to reside.

Beginning with the private houses so occupied, they broke open the doors and windows; and while they destroyed the furniture and left but the bare walls, made a sharp search for tools and engines of destruction, such as hammers, pokers, axes, saws, and such like instruments. Many of the rioters made belts of cord, of handkerchiefs, or any material they found at hand, and wore these weapons as openly as pioneers upon a field-day. There was not the least disguise or concealment - indeed, on this night, very little excitement or hurry. From the chapels, they tore down and took away the very altars, benches, pulpits, pews, and flooring; from the dwelling-houses, the very wainscoting and stairs. This Sunday evening's recreation they pursued like mere workmen who had a certain task to do, and did it. Fifty resolute men might have turned them at any moment; a single company of soldiers could have scattered them like dust; but no man interposed, no authority restrained them, and, except by the terrified persons who fled from their approach, they were as little heeded as if they were pursuing their lawful occupations with the utmost sobriety and good conduct.

In the same manner, they marched to the place of rendezvous agreed upon, made great fires in the fields, and reserving the most valuable of their spoils, burnt the rest. Priestly garments, images of saints, rich stuffs and ornaments, altar-furniture and household goods, were cast into the flames, and shed a glare on the whole country round; but they danced and howled, and roared about these fires till they were tired, and were never for an instant checked.

As the main body filed off from this scene of action, and passed down Welbeck Street, they came upon Gashford, who had been a witness of their proceedings, and was walking stealthily along the pavement.

Keeping up with him, and yet not seeming to speak, Hugh muttered in his ear:

'Is this better, master?'

'No,' said Gashford. 'It is not.'

'What would you have?' said Hugh. 'Fevers are never at their height at once. They must get on by degrees.'

'I would have you,' said Gashford, pinching his arm with such malevolence that his nails seemed to meet in the skin; 'I would have you put some meaning into your work. Fools! Can you make no better bonfires than of rags and scraps? Can you burn nothing whole?'

'A little patience, master,' said Hugh. 'Wait but a few hours, and you shall see. Look for a redness in the sky, to-morrow night.'

With that, he fell back into his place beside Barnaby; and when the secretary looked after him, both were lost in the crowd.