

## Chapter LVI

A day or two after the Quilp tea-party at the Wilderness, Mr Swiveller walked into Sampson Brass's office at the usual hour, and being alone in that Temple of Probity, placed his hat upon the desk, and taking from his pocket a small parcel of black crape, applied himself to folding and pinning the same upon it, after the manner of a hatband. Having completed the construction of this appendage, he surveyed his work with great complacency, and put his hat on again - very much over one eye, to increase the mournfulness of the effect. These arrangements perfected to his entire satisfaction, he thrust his hands into his pockets, and walked up and down the office with measured steps.

'It has always been the same with me,' said Mr Swiveller, 'always. 'Twas ever thus - from childhood's hour I've seen my fondest hopes decay, I never loved a tree or flower but 'twas the first to fade away; I never nursed a dear Gazelle, to glad me with its soft black eye, but when it came to know me well, and love me, it was sure to marry a market-gardener.'

Overpowered by these reflections, Mr Swiveller stopped short at the clients' chair, and flung himself into its open arms.

'And this,' said Mr Swiveller, with a kind of bantering composure, 'is life, I believe. Oh, certainly. Why not! I'm quite satisfied. I shall wear,' added Richard, taking off his hat again and looking hard at it, as if he were only deterred by pecuniary considerations from spurning it with his foot, 'I shall wear this emblem of woman's perfidy, in remembrance of her with whom I shall never again thread the windings of the mazy; whom I shall never more pledge in the rosy; who, during the short remainder of my existence, will murder the balmy. Ha, ha, ha!'

It may be necessary to observe, lest there should appear any incongruity in the close of this soliloquy, that Mr Swiveller did not wind up with a cheerful hilarious laugh, which would have been undoubtedly at variance with his solemn reflections, but that, being in a theatrical mood, he merely achieved that performance which is designated in melodramas 'laughing like a fiend,' - for it seems that your fiends always laugh in syllables, and always in three syllables, never more nor less, which is a remarkable property in such gentry, and one worthy of remembrance.

The baleful sounds had hardly died away, and Mr Swiveller was still sitting in a very grim state in the clients' chair, when there came a ring - or, if we may adapt the sound to his then humour, a knell - at the office bell. Opening the door with all speed, he beheld the

expressive countenance of Mr Chuckster, between whom and himself a fraternal greeting ensued.

'You're devilish early at this pestiferous old slaughter-house,' said that gentleman, poising himself on one leg, and shaking the other in an easy manner.

'Rather,' returned Dick.

'Rather!' retorted Mr Chuckster, with that air of graceful trifling which so well became him. 'I should think so. Why, my good feller, do you know what o'clock it is - half-past nine a.m. in the morning?'

'Won't you come in?' said Dick. 'All alone. Swiveller solus. 'Tis now the witching - '

'Hour of night!'

'When churchyards yawn,'

'And graves give up their dead.'

At the end of this quotation in dialogue, each gentleman struck an attitude, and immediately subsiding into prose walked into the office. Such morsels of enthusiasm are common among the Glorious Apollos, and were indeed the links that bound them together, and raised them above the cold dull earth.

'Well, and how are you my buck?' said Mr Chuckster, taking a stool. 'I was forced to come into the City upon some little private matters of my own, and couldn't pass the corner of the street without looking in, but upon my soul I didn't expect to find you. It is so everlastingly early.'

Mr Swiveller expressed his acknowledgments; and it appearing on further conversation that he was in good health, and that Mr Chuckster was in the like enviable condition, both gentlemen, in compliance with a solemn custom of the ancient Brotherhood to which they belonged, joined in a fragment of the popular duet of 'All's Well,' with a long shake' at the end.

'And what's the news?' said Richard.

'The town's as flat, my dear feller,' replied Mr Chuckster, 'as the surface of a Dutch oven. There's no news. By-the-bye, that lodger of yours is a most extraordinary person. He quite eludes the most vigorous comprehension, you know. Never was such a feller!'

'What has he been doing now?' said Dick.

'By Jove, Sir,' returned Mr Chuckster, taking out an oblong snuff-box, the lid whereof was ornamented with a fox's head curiously carved in brass, 'that man is an unfathomable. Sir, that man has made friends with our articed clerk. There's no harm in him, but he is so amazingly slow and soft. Now, if he wanted a friend, why couldn't he have one that knew a thing or two, and could do him some good by his manners and conversation. I have my faults, sir,' said Mr Chuckster -

'No, no,' interposed Mr Swiveller.

'Oh yes I have, I have my faults, no man knows his faults better than I know mine. But,' said Mr Chuckster, 'I'm not meek. My worst enemies - every man has his enemies, Sir, and I have mine - never accused me of being meek. And I tell you what, Sir, if I hadn't more of these qualities that commonly endear man to man, than our articed clerk has, I'd steal a Cheshire cheese, tie it round my neck, and drown myself. I'd die degraded, as I had lived. I would upon my honour.'

Mr Chuckster paused, rapped the fox's head exactly on the nose with the knuckle of the fore-finger, took a pinch of snuff, and looked steadily at Mr Swiveller, as much as to say that if he thought he was going to sneeze, he would find himself mistaken.

'Not contented, Sir,' said Mr Chuckster, 'with making friends with Abel, he has cultivated the acquaintance of his father and mother. Since he came home from that wild-goose chase, he has been there - actually been there. He patronises young Snobby besides; you'll find, Sir, that he'll be constantly coming backwards and forwards to this place: yet I don't suppose that beyond the common forms of civility, he has ever exchanged half-a-dozen words with me. Now, upon my soul, you know,' said Mr Chuckster, shaking his head gravely, as men are wont to do when they consider things are going a little too far, 'this is altogether such a low-minded affair, that if I didn't feel for the governor, and know that he could never get on without me, I should be obliged to cut the connection. I should have no alternative.'

Mr Swiveller, who sat on another stool opposite to his friend, stirred the fire in an excess of sympathy, but said nothing.

'As to young Snob, sir,' pursued Mr Chuckster with a prophetic look, 'you'll find he'll turn out bad. In our profession we know something of human nature, and take my word for it, that the feller that came back to work out that shilling, will show himself one of these days in his true colours. He's a low thief, sir. He must be.'

Mr Chuckster being roused, would probably have pursued this subject further, and in more emphatic language, but for a tap at the door, which seeming to announce the arrival of somebody on business, caused him to assume a greater appearance of meekness than was perhaps quite consistent with his late declaration. Mr Swiveller, hearing the same sound, caused his stool to revolve rapidly on one leg until it brought him to his desk, into which, having forgotten in the sudden flurry of his spirits to part with the poker, he thrust it as he cried 'Come in!'

Who should present himself but that very Kit who had been the theme of Mr Chuckster's wrath! Never did man pluck up his courage so quickly, or look so fierce, as Mr Chuckster when he found it was he. Mr Swiveller stared at him for a moment, and then leaping from his stool, and drawing out the poker from its place of concealment, performed the broad-sword exercise with all the cuts and guards complete, in a species of frenzy.

'Is the gentleman at home?' said Kit, rather astonished by this uncommon reception.

Before Mr Swiveller could make any reply, Mr Chuckster took occasion to enter his indignant protest against this form of inquiry; which he held to be of a disrespectful and snobbish tendency, inasmuch as the inquirer, seeing two gentlemen then and there present, should have spoken of the other gentleman; or rather (for it was not impossible that the object of his search might be of inferior quality) should have mentioned his name, leaving it to his hearers to determine his degree as they thought proper. Mr Chuckster likewise remarked, that he had some reason to believe this form of address was personal to himself, and that he was not a man to be trifled with - as certain snobs (whom he did not more particularly mention or describe) might find to their cost.

'I mean the gentleman up-stairs,' said Kit, turning to Richard Swiveller. 'Is he at home?'

'Why?' rejoined Dick.

'Because if he is, I have a letter for him.'

'From whom?' said Dick.

'From Mr Garland.'

'Oh!' said Dick, with extreme politeness. 'Then you may hand it over, Sir. And if you're to wait for an answer, Sir, you may wait in the passage, Sir, which is an airy and well-ventilated apartment, sir.'

'Thank you,' returned Kit. 'But I am to give it to himself, if you please.'

The excessive audacity of this retort so overpowered Mr Chuckster, and so moved his tender regard for his friend's honour, that he declared, if he were not restrained by official considerations, he must certainly have annihilated Kit upon the spot; a resentment of the affront which he did consider, under the extraordinary circumstances of aggravation attending it, could but have met with the proper sanction and approval of a jury of Englishmen, who, he had no doubt, would have returned a verdict of justifiable Homicide, coupled with a high testimony to the morals and character of the Avenger. Mr Swiveller, without being quite so hot upon the matter, was rather shamed by his friend's excitement, and not a little puzzled how to act (Kit being quite cool and good-humoured), when the single gentleman was heard to call violently down the stairs.

'Didn't I see somebody for me, come in?' cried the lodger.

'Yes, Sir,' replied Dick. 'Certainly, Sir.'

'Then where is he?' roared the single gentleman.

'He's here, sir,' rejoined Mr Swiveller. 'Now young man, don't you hear you're to go up-stairs? Are you deaf?'

Kit did not appear to think it worth his while to enter into any altercation, but hurried off and left the Glorious Apollos gazing at each other in silence.

'Didn't I tell you so?' said Mr Chuckster. 'What do you think of that?'

Mr Swiveller being in the main a good-natured fellow, and not perceiving in the conduct of Kit any villany of enormous magnitude, scarcely knew what answer to return. He was relieved from his perplexity, however, by the entrance of Mr Sampson and his sister, Sally, at sight of whom Mr Chuckster precipitately retired.

Mr Brass and his lovely companion appeared to have been holding a consultation over their temperate breakfast, upon some matter of great interest and importance. On the occasion of such conferences, they generally appeared in the office some half an hour after their usual time, and in a very smiling state, as though their late plots and designs had tranquillised their minds and shed a light upon their toilsome way. In the present instance, they seemed particularly gay; Miss Sally's aspect being of a most oily kind, and Mr Brass rubbing his hands in an exceedingly jocose and light-hearted manner. 'Well, Mr Richard,' said Brass. 'How are we this morning? Are we pretty fresh and cheerful sir - eh, Mr Richard?'

'Pretty well, sir,' replied Dick.

'That's well,' said Brass. 'Ha ha! We should be as gay as larks, Mr Richard - why not? It's a pleasant world we live in sir, a very pleasant world. There are bad people in it, Mr Richard, but if there were no bad people, there would be no good lawyers. Ha ha! Any letters by the post this morning, Mr Richard?'

Mr Swiveller answered in the negative.

'Ha!' said Brass, 'no matter. If there's little business to-day, there'll be more to-morrow. A contented spirit, Mr Richard, is the sweetness of existence. Anybody been here, sir?'

'Only my friend' - replied Dick. 'May we ne'er want a - '

'Friend,' Brass chimed in quickly, 'or a bottle to give him.' Ha ha! That's the way the song runs, isn't it? A very good song, Mr Richard, very good. I like the sentiment of it. Ha ha! Your friend's the young man from Witherden's office I think - yes - May we ne'er want a - Nobody else at all, been, Mr Richard?'

'Only somebody to the lodger,' replied Mr Swiveller.

'Oh indeed!' cried Brass. 'Somebody to the lodger eh? Ha ha! May we ne'er want a friend, or a - Somebody to the lodger, eh, Mr Richard?'

'Yes,' said Dick, a little disconcerted by the excessive buoyancy of spirits which his employer displayed. 'With him now.'

'With him now!' cried Brass; 'Ha ha! There let 'em be, merry and free, toor rul rol le. Eh, Mr Richard? Ha ha!'

'Oh certainly,' replied Dick. 'And who,' said Brass, shuffling among his papers, 'who is the lodger's visitor - not a lady visitor, I hope, eh, Mr Richard? The morals of the Marks you know, sir - 'when lovely women stoops to folly' - and all that - eh, Mr Richard?'

'Another young man, who belongs to Witherden's too, or half belongs there,' returned Richard. 'Kit, they call him.'

'Kit, eh!' said Brass. 'Strange name - name of a dancing- master's fiddle, eh, Mr Richard? Ha ha! Kit's there, is he? Oh!'

Dick looked at Miss Sally, wondering that she didn't check this uncommon exuberance on the part of Mr Sampson; but as she made no attempt to do so, and rather appeared to exhibit a tacit

acquiescence in it, he concluded that they had just been cheating somebody, and receiving the bill.

'Will you have the goodness, Mr Richard,' said Brass, taking a letter from his desk, 'just to step over to Peckham Rye with that? There's no answer, but it's rather particular and should go by hand. Charge the office with your coach-hire back, you know; don't spare the office; get as much out of it as you can - clerk's motto - Eh, Mr Richard? Ha ha!'

Mr Swiveller solemnly doffed the aquatic jacket, put on his coat, took down his hat from its peg, pocketed the letter, and departed. As soon as he was gone, up rose Miss Sally Brass, and smiling sweetly at her brother (who nodded and smote his nose in return) withdrew also.

Sampson Brass was no sooner left alone, than he set the office- door wide open, and establishing himself at his desk directly opposite, so that he could not fail to see anybody who came down-stairs and passed out at the street door, began to write with extreme cheerfulness and assiduity; humming as he did so, in a voice that was anything but musical, certain vocal snatches which appeared to have reference to the union between Church and State, inasmuch as they were compounded of the Evening Hymn and God save the King.

Thus, the attorney of Bevis Marks sat, and wrote, and hummed, for a long time, except when he stopped to listen with a very cunning face, and hearing nothing, went on humming louder, and writing slower than ever. At length, in one of these pauses, he heard his lodger's door opened and shut, and footsteps coming down the stairs. Then, Mr Brass left off writing entirely, and, with his pen in his hand, hummed his very loudest; shaking his head meanwhile from side to side, like a man whose whole soul was in the music, and smiling in a manner quite seraphic.

It was towards this moving spectacle that the staircase and the sweet sounds guided Kit; on whose arrival before his door, Mr Brass stopped his singing, but not his smiling, and nodded affably: at the same time beckoning to him with his pen.

'Kit,' said Mr Brass, in the pleasantest way imaginable, 'how do you do?'

Kit, being rather shy of his friend, made a suitable reply, and had his hand upon the lock of the street door when Mr Brass called him softly back.

'You are not to go, if you please, Kit,' said the attorney in a mysterious and yet business-like way. 'You are to step in here, if you please. Dear me, dear me! When I look at you,' said the lawyer, quitting his stool,

and standing before the fire with his back towards it, 'I am reminded of the sweetest little face that ever my eyes beheld. I remember your coming there, twice or thrice, when we were in possession. Ah Kit, my dear fellow, gentlemen in my profession have such painful duties to perform sometimes, that you needn't envy us - you needn't indeed!'

'I don't, sir,' said Kit, 'though it isn't for the like of me to judge.'

'Our only consolation, Kit,' pursued the lawyer, looking at him in a sort of pensive abstraction, 'is, that although we cannot turn away the wind, we can soften it; we can temper it, if I may say so, to the shorn lambs.'

'Shorn indeed!' thought Kit. 'Pretty close!' But he didn't say SO.

'On that occasion, Kit,' said Mr Brass, 'on that occasion that I have just alluded to, I had a hard battle with Mr Quilp (for Mr Quilp is a very hard man) to obtain them the indulgence they had. It might have cost me a client. But suffering virtue inspired me, and I prevailed.'

'He's not so bad after all,' thought honest Kit, as the attorney pursed up his lips and looked like a man who was struggling with his better feelings.

'I respect you, Kit,' said Brass with emotion. 'I saw enough of your conduct, at that time, to respect you, though your station is humble, and your fortune lowly. It isn't the waistcoat that I look at. It is the heart. The checks in the waistcoat are but the wires of the cage. But the heart is the bird. Ah! How many such birds are perpetually moulting, and putting their beaks through the wires to peck at all mankind!'

This poetic figure, which Kit took to be in a special allusion to his own checked waistcoat, quite overcame him; Mr Brass's voice and manner added not a little to its effect, for he discoursed with all the mild austerity of a hermit, and wanted but a cord round the waist of his rusty surtout, and a skull on the chimney-piece, to be completely set up in that line of business.

'Well, well,' said Sampson, smiling as good men smile when they compassionate their own weakness or that of their fellow-creatures, 'this is wide of the bull's-eye. You're to take that, if you please.' As he spoke, he pointed to a couple of half-crowns on the desk.

Kit looked at the coins, and then at Sampson, and hesitated.

'For yourself,' said Brass. 'From - '



'No matter about the person they came from,' replied the lawyer. 'Say me, if you like. We have eccentric friends overhead, Kit, and we mustn't ask questions or talk too much - you understand? You're to take them, that's all; and between you and me, I don't think they'll be the last you'll have to take from the same place. I hope not. Good bye, Kit. Good bye!'

With many thanks, and many more self-reproaches for having on such slight grounds suspected one who in their very first conversation turned out such a different man from what he had supposed, Kit took the money and made the best of his way home. Mr Brass remained airing himself at the fire, and resumed his vocal exercise, and his seraphic smile, simultaneously.

'May I come in?' said Miss Sally, peeping.

'Oh yes, you may come in,' returned her brother.

'Ahem!' coughed Miss Brass interrogatively.

'Why, yes,' returned Sampson, 'I should say as good as done.'