

Chapter LXVI

On awaking in the morning, Richard Swiveller became conscious, by slow degrees, of whispering voices in his room. Looking out between the curtains, he espied Mr Garland, Mr Abel, the notary, and the single gentleman, gathered round the Marchioness, and talking to her with great earnestness but in very subdued tones - fearing, no doubt, to disturb him. He lost no time in letting them know that this precaution was unnecessary, and all four gentlemen directly approached his bedside. Old Mr Garland was the first to stretch out his hand, and inquire how he felt.

Dick was about to answer that he felt much better, though still as weak as need be, when his little nurse, pushing the visitors aside and pressing up to his pillow as if in jealousy of their interference, set his breakfast before him, and insisted on his taking it before he underwent the fatigue of speaking or of being spoken to. Mr Swiveller, who was perfectly ravenous, and had had, all night, amazingly distinct and consistent dreams of mutton chops, double stout, and similar delicacies, felt even the weak tea and dry toast such irresistible temptations, that he consented to eat and drink on one condition.

'And that is,' said Dick, returning the pressure of Mr Garland's hand, 'that you answer me this question truly, before I take a bit or drop. Is it too late?'

'For completing the work you began so well last night?' returned the old gentleman. 'No. Set your mind at rest on that point. It is not, I assure you.'

Comforted by this intelligence, the patient applied himself to his food with a keen appetite, though evidently not with a greater zest in the eating than his nurse appeared to have in seeing him eat. The manner of this meal was this: - Mr Swiveller, holding the slice of toast or cup of tea in his left hand, and taking a bite or drink, as the case might be, constantly kept, in his right, one palm of the Marchioness tight locked; and to shake, or even to kiss this imprisoned hand, he would stop every now and then, in the very act of swallowing, with perfect seriousness of intention, and the utmost gravity. As often as he put anything into his mouth, whether for eating or drinking, the face of the Marchioness lighted up beyond all description; but whenever he gave her one or other of these tokens of recognition, her countenance became overshadowed, and she began to sob. Now, whether she was in her laughing joy, or in her crying one, the Marchioness could not help turning to the visitors with an appealing look, which seemed to say, 'You see this fellow - can I help this?' - and they, being thus made, as it were, parties to the scene, as regularly answered by another look, 'No. Certainly not.' This dumb-show, taking place during

the whole time of the invalid's breakfast, and the invalid himself, pale and emaciated, performing no small part in the same, it may be fairly questioned whether at any meal, where no word, good or bad, was spoken from beginning to end, so much was expressed by gestures in themselves so slight and unimportant.

At length - and to say the truth before very long - Mr Swiveller had despatched as much toast and tea as in that stage of his recovery it was discreet to let him have. But the cares of the Marchioness did not stop here; for, disappearing for an instant and presently returning with a basin of fair water, she laved his face and hands, brushed his hair, and in short made him as spruce and smart as anybody under such circumstances could be made; and all this, in as brisk and business-like a manner, as if he were a very little boy, and she his grown-up nurse. To these various attentions, Mr Swiveller submitted in a kind of grateful astonishment beyond the reach of language. When they were at last brought to an end, and the Marchioness had withdrawn into a distant corner to take her own poor breakfast (cold enough by that time), he turned his face away for some few moments, and shook hands heartily with the air.

'Gentlemen,' said Dick, rousing himself from this pause, and turning round again, 'you'll excuse me. Men who have been brought so low as I have been, are easily fatigued. I am fresh again now, and fit for talking. We're short of chairs here, among other trifles, but if you'll do me the favour to sit upon the bed - '

'What can we do for you?' said Mr Garland, kindly.

'if you could make the Marchioness yonder, a Marchioness, in real, sober earnest,' returned Dick, 'I'd thank you to get it done off-hand. But as you can't, and as the question is not what you will do for me, but what you will do for somebody else who has a better claim upon you, pray sir let me know what you intend doing.'

'It's chiefly on that account that we have come just now,' said the single gentleman, 'for you will have another visitor presently. We feared you would be anxious unless you knew from ourselves what steps we intended to take, and therefore came to you before we stirred in the matter.'

'Gentlemen,' returned Dick, 'I thank you. Anybody in the helpless state that you see me in, is naturally anxious. Don't let me interrupt you, sir.'

'Then, you see, my good fellow,' said the single gentleman, 'that while we have no doubt whatever of the truth of this disclosure, which has so providentially come to light - '

'Meaning hers?' said Dick, pointing towards the Marchioness.

' - Meaning hers, of course. While we have no doubt of that, or that a proper use of it would procure the poor lad's immediate pardon and liberation, we have a great doubt whether it would, by itself, enable us to reach Quilp, the chief agent in this villany. I should tell you that this doubt has been confirmed into something very nearly approaching certainty by the best opinions we have been enabled, in this short space of time, to take upon the subject. You'll agree with us, that to give him even the most distant chance of escape, if we could help it, would be monstrous. You say with us, no doubt, if somebody must escape, let it be any one but he.'

'Yes,' returned Dick, 'certainly. That is if somebody must - but upon my word, I'm unwilling that Anybody should. Since laws were made for every degree, to curb vice in others as well as in me - and so forth you know - doesn't it strike you in that light?'

The single gentleman smiled as if the light in which Mr Swiveller had put the question were not the clearest in the world, and proceeded to explain that they contemplated proceeding by stratagem in the first instance; and that their design was to endeavour to extort a confession from the gentle Sarah.

'When she finds how much we know, and how we know it,' he said, 'and that she is clearly compromised already, we are not without strong hopes that we may be enabled through her means to punish the other two effectually. If we could do that, she might go scot-free for aught I cared.'

Dick received this project in anything but a gracious manner, representing with as much warmth as he was then capable of showing, that they would find the old buck (meaning Sarah) more difficult to manage than Quilp himself - that, for any tampering, terrifying, or cajolery, she was a very unpromising and unyielding subject - that she was of a kind of brass not easily melted or moulded into shape - in short, that they were no match for her, and would be signally defeated. But it was in vain to urge them to adopt some other course. The single gentleman has been described as explaining their joint intentions, but it should have been written that they all spoke together; that if any one of them by chance held his peace for a moment, he stood gasping and panting for an opportunity to strike in again: in a word, that they had reached that pitch of impatience and anxiety where men can neither be persuaded nor reasoned with; and that it would have been as easy to turn the most impetuous wind that ever blew, as to prevail on them to reconsider their determination. So, after telling Mr Swiveller how they had not lost sight of Kit's mother and the children; how they had never once even lost sight of Kit

himself, but had been unremitting in their endeavours to procure a mitigation of his sentence; how they had been perfectly distracted between the strong proofs of his guilt, and their own fading hopes of his innocence; and how he, Richard Swiveller, might keep his mind at rest, for everything should be happily adjusted between that time and night; - after telling him all this, and adding a great many kind and cordial expressions, personal to himself, which it is unnecessary to recite, Mr Garland, the notary, and the single gentleman, took their leaves at a very critical time, or Richard Swiveller must assuredly have been driven into another fever, whereof the results might have been fatal.

Mr Abel remained behind, very often looking at his watch and at the room door, until Mr Swiveller was roused from a short nap, by the setting-down on the landing-place outside, as from the shoulders of a porter, of some giant load, which seemed to shake the house, and made the little physic bottles on the mantel-shelf ring again. Directly this sound reached his ears, Mr Abel started up, and hobbled to the door, and opened it; and behold! there stood a strong man, with a mighty hamper, which, being hauled into the room and presently unpacked, disgorged such treasures as tea, and coffee, and wine, and rusks, and oranges, and grapes, and fowls ready trussed for boiling, and calves'-foot jelly, and arrow-root, and sago, and other delicate restoratives, that the small servant, who had never thought it possible that such things could be, except in shops, stood rooted to the spot in her one shoe, with her mouth and eyes watering in unison, and her power of speech quite gone. But, not so Mr Abel; or the strong man who emptied the hamper, big as it was, in a twinkling; and not so the nice old lady, who appeared so suddenly that she might have come out of the hamper too (it was quite large enough), and who, bustling about on tiptoe and without noise - now here, now there, now everywhere at once - began to fill out the jelly in tea-cups, and to make chicken broth in small saucepans, and to peel oranges for the sick man and to cut them up in little pieces, and to ply the small servant with glasses of wine and choice bits of everything until more substantial meat could be prepared for her refreshment. The whole of which appearances were so unexpected and bewildering, that Mr Swiveller, when he had taken two oranges and a little jelly, and had seen the strong man walk off with the empty basket, plainly leaving all that abundance for his use and benefit, was fain to lie down and fall asleep again, from sheer inability to entertain such wonders in his mind.

Meanwhile, the single gentleman, the Notary, and Mr Garland, repaired to a certain coffee-house, and from that place indited and sent a letter to Miss Sally Brass, requesting her, in terms mysterious and brief, to favour an unknown friend who wished to consult her, with her company there, as speedily as possible. The communication

performed its errand so well, that within ten minutes of the messenger's return and report of its delivery, Miss Brass herself was announced.

'Pray ma'am,' said the single gentleman, whom she found alone in the room, 'take a chair.'

Miss Brass sat herself down, in a very stiff and frigid state, and seemed - as indeed she was - not a little astonished to find that the lodger and her mysterious correspondent were one and the same person.

'You did not expect to see me?' said the single gentleman.

'I didn't think much about it,' returned the beauty. 'I supposed it was business of some kind or other. If it's about the apartments, of course you'll give my brother regular notice, you know - or money. That's very easily settled. You're a responsible party, and in such a case lawful money and lawful notice are pretty much the same.'

'I am obliged to you for your good opinion,' retorted the single gentleman, 'and quite concur in these sentiments. But that is not the subject on which I wish to speak with you.'

'Oh!' said Sally. 'Then just state the particulars, will you? I suppose it's professional business?'

'Why, it is connected with the law, certainly.'

'Very well,' returned Miss Brass. 'My brother and I are just the same. I can take any instructions, or give you any advice.'

'As there are other parties interested besides myself,' said the single gentleman, rising and opening the door of an inner room, 'we had better confer together. Miss Brass is here, gentlemen.' Mr Garland and the Notary walked in, looking very grave; and, drawing up two chairs, one on each side of the single gentleman, formed a kind of fence round the gentle Sarah, and penned her into a corner. Her brother Sampson under such circumstances would certainly have evinced some confusion or anxiety, but she - all composure - pulled out the tin box, and calmly took a pinch of snuff.

'Miss Brass,' said the Notary, taking the word at this crisis, 'we professional people understand each other, and, when we choose, can say what we have to say, in very few words. You advertised a runaway servant, the other day?'

'Well,' returned Miss Sally, with a sudden flush overspreading her features, 'what of that?'

'She is found, ma'am,' said the Notary, pulling out his pocket-handkerchief with a flourish. 'She is found.'

'Who found her?' demanded Sarah hastily.

'We did, ma'am - we three. Only last night, or you would have heard from us before.'

'And now I have heard from you,' said Miss Brass, folding her arms as though she were about to deny something to the death, 'what have you got to say? Something you have got into your heads about her, of course. Prove it, will you - that's all. Prove it. You have found her, you say. I can tell you (if you don't know it) that you have found the most artful, lying, pilfering, devilish little minx that was ever born. - Have you got her here?' she added, looking sharply round.

'No, she is not here at present,' returned the Notary. 'But she is quite safe.'

'Ha!' cried Sally, twitching a pinch of snuff out of her box, as spitefully as if she were in the very act of wrenching off the small servant's nose; 'she shall be safe enough from this time, I warrant you.'

'I hope so,' replied the Notary. 'Did it occur to you for the first time, when you found she had run away, that there were two keys to your kitchen door?'

Miss Sally took another pinch, and putting her head on one side, looked at her questioner, with a curious kind of spasm about her mouth, but with a cunning aspect of immense expression.

'Two keys,' repeated the Notary; 'one of which gave her the opportunities of roaming through the house at nights when you supposed her fast locked up, and of overhearing confidential consultations - among others, that particular conference, to be described to-day before a justice, which you will have an opportunity of hearing her relate; that conference which you and Mr Brass held together, on the night before that most unfortunate and innocent young man was accused of robbery, by a horrible device of which I will only say that it may be characterised by the epithets which you have applied to this wretched little witness, and by a few stronger ones besides.'

Sally took another pinch. Although her face was wonderfully composed, it was apparent that she was wholly taken by surprise, and

that what she had expected to be taxed with, in connection with her small servant, was something very different from this.

'Come, come, Miss Brass,' said the Notary, 'you have great command of feature, but you feel, I see, that by a chance which never entered your imagination, this base design is revealed, and two of its plotters must be brought to justice. Now, you know the pains and penalties you are liable to, and so I need not dilate upon them, but I have a proposal to make to you. You have the honour of being sister to one of the greatest scoundrels unhung; and, if I may venture to say so to a lady, you are in every respect quite worthy of him. But connected with you two is a third party, a villain of the name of Quilp, the prime mover of the whole diabolical device, who I believe to be worse than either. For his sake, Miss Brass, do us the favour to reveal the whole history of this affair. Let me remind you that your doing so, at our instance, will place you in a safe and comfortable position - your present one is not desirable - and cannot injure your brother; for against him and you we have quite sufficient evidence (as you hear) already. I will not say to you that we suggest this course in mercy (for, to tell you the truth, we do not entertain any regard for you), but it is a necessity to which we are reduced, and I recommend it to you as a matter of the very best policy. Time,' said Mr Witherden, pulling out his watch, 'in a business like this, is exceedingly precious. Favour us with your decision as speedily as possible, ma'am.'

With a smile upon her face, and looking at each of the three by turns, Miss Brass took two or three more pinches of snuff, and having by this time very little left, travelled round and round the box with her forefinger and thumb, scraping up another. Having disposed of this likewise and put the box carefully in her pocket, she said, -

'I am to accept or reject at once, am I?'

'Yes,' said Mr Witherden.

The charming creature was opening her lips to speak in reply, when the door was hastily opened too, and the head of Sampson Brass was thrust into the room.

'Excuse me,' said the gentleman hastily. 'Wait a bit!'

So saying, and quite indifferent to the astonishment his presence occasioned, he crept in, shut the door, kissed his greasy glove as servilely as if it were the dust, and made a most abject bow.

'Sarah,' said Brass, 'hold your tongue if you please, and let me speak. Gentlemen, if I could express the pleasure it gives me to see three such men in a happy unity of feeling and concord of sentiment, I think

you would hardly believe me. But though I am unfortunate - nay, gentlemen, criminal, if we are to use harsh expressions in a company like this - still, I have my feelings like other men. I have heard of a poet, who remarked that feelings were the common lot of all. If he could have been a pig, gentlemen, and have uttered that sentiment, he would still have been immortal.'

'If you're not an idiot,' said Miss Brass harshly, 'hold your peace.'

'Sarah, my dear,' returned her brother, 'thank you. But I know what I am about, my love, and will take the liberty of expressing myself accordingly. Mr Witherden, Sir, your handkerchief is hanging out of your pocket - would you allow me to - ,

As Mr Brass advanced to remedy this accident, the Notary shrunk from him with an air of disgust. Brass, who over and above his usual prepossessing qualities, had a scratched face, a green shade over one eye, and a hat grievously crushed, stopped short, and looked round with a pitiful smile.

'He shuns me,' said Sampson, 'even when I would, as I may say, heap coals of fire upon his head. Well! Ah! But I am a falling house, and the rats (if I may be allowed the expression in reference to a gentleman I respect and love beyond everything) fly from me! Gentlemen - regarding your conversation just now, I happened to see my sister on her way here, and, wondering where she could be going to, and being - may I venture to say? - naturally of a suspicious turn, followed her. Since then, I have been listening.' 'If you're not mad,' interposed Miss Sally, 'stop there, and say no more.'

'Sarah, my dear,' rejoined Brass with undiminished politeness, 'I thank you kindly, but will still proceed. Mr Witherden, sir, as we have the honour to be members of the same profession - to say nothing of that other gentleman having been my lodger, and having partaken, as one may say, of the hospitality of my roof - I think you might have given me the refusal of this offer in the first instance. I do indeed. Now, my dear Sir,' cried Brass, seeing that the Notary was about to interrupt him, 'suffer me to speak, I beg.'

Mr Witherden was silent, and Brass went on.

'If you will do me the favour,' he said, holding up the green shade, and revealing an eye most horribly discoloured, 'to look at this, you will naturally inquire, in your own minds, how did I get it. If you look from that, to my face, you will wonder what could have been the cause of all these scratches. And if from them to my hat, how it came into the state in which you see it. Gentlemen,' said Brass, striking the hat

fiercely with his clenched hand, 'to all these questions I answer - Quilp!'

The three gentlemen looked at each other, but said nothing.

'I say,' pursued Brass, glancing aside at his sister, as though he were talking for her information, and speaking with a snarling malignity, in violent contrast to his usual smoothness, 'that I answer to all these questions, - Quilp - Quilp, who deludes me into his infernal den, and takes a delight in looking on and chuckling while I scorch, and burn, and bruise, and maim myself - Quilp, who never once, no never once, in all our communications together, has treated me otherwise than as a dog - Quilp, whom I have always hated with my whole heart, but never so much as lately. He gives me the cold shoulder on this very matter as if he had had nothing to do with it, instead of being the first to propose it. I can't trust him. In one of his howling, raving, blazing humours, I believe he'd let it out, if it was murder, and never think of himself so long as he could terrify me. Now,' said Brass, picking up his hat again and replacing the shade over his eye, and actually crouching down, in the excess of his servility, 'What does all this lead to? - what should you say it led me to, gentlemen? - could you guess at all near the mark?'

Nobody spoke. Brass stood smirking for a little while, as if he had propounded some choice conundrum; and then said:

'To be short with you, then, it leads me to this. If the truth has come out, as it plainly has in a manner that there's no standing up against - and a very sublime and grand thing is Truth, gentlemen, in its way, though like other sublime and grand things, such as thunder-storms and that, we're not always over and above glad to see it - I had better turn upon this man than let this man turn upon me. It's clear to me that I am done for. Therefore, if anybody is to split, I had better be the person and have the advantage of it. Sarah, my dear, comparatively speaking you're safe. I relate these circumstances for my own profit.'

With that, Mr Brass, in a great hurry, revealed the whole story; bearing as heavily as possible on his amiable employer, and making himself out to be rather a saint-like and holy character, though subject - he acknowledged - to human weaknesses. He concluded thus:

'Now, gentlemen, I am not a man who does things by halves. Being in for a penny, I am ready, as the saying is, to be in for a pound. You must do with me what you please, and take me where you please. If you wish to have this in writing, we'll reduce it into manuscript immediately. You will be tender with me, I am sure. I am quite confident you will be tender with me. You are men of honour, and

have feeling hearts. I yielded from necessity to Quilp, for though necessity has no law, she has her lawyers. I yield to you from necessity too; from policy besides; and because of feelings that have been a pretty long time working within me. Punish Quilp, gentlemen. Weigh heavily upon him. Grind him down. Tread him under foot. He has done as much by me, for many and many a day.'

Having now arrived at the conclusion of his discourse, Sampson checked the current of his wrath, kissed his glove again, and smiled as only parasites and cowards can.

'And this,' said Miss Brass, raising her head, with which she had hitherto sat resting on her hands, and surveying him from head to foot with a bitter sneer, 'this is my brother, is it! This is my brother, that I have worked and toiled for, and believed to have had something of the man in him!'

'Sarah, my dear,' returned Sampson, rubbing his hands feebly; you disturb our friends. Besides you - you're disappointed, Sarah, and, not knowing what you say, expose yourself.'

'Yes, you pitiful dastard,' retorted the lovely damsel, 'I understand you. You feared that I should be beforehand with you. But do you think that I would have been enticed to say a word! I'd have scorned it, if they had tried and tempted me for twenty years.'

'He he!' simpered Brass, who, in his deep debasement, really seemed to have changed sexes with his sister, and to have made over to her any spark of manliness he might have possessed. 'You think so, Sarah, you think so perhaps; but you would have acted quite different, my good fellow. You will not have forgotten that it was a maxim with Foxey - our revered father, gentlemen - 'Always suspect everybody.' That's the maxim to go through life with! If you were not actually about to purchase your own safety when I showed myself, I suspect you'd have done it by this time. And therefore I've done it myself, and spared you the trouble as well as the shame. The shame, gentlemen,' added Brass, allowing himself to be slightly overcome, 'if there is any, is mine. It's better that a female should be spared it.'

With deference to the better opinion of Mr Brass, and more particularly to the authority of his Great Ancestor, it may be doubted, with humility, whether the elevating principle laid down by the latter gentleman, and acted upon by his descendant, is always a prudent one, or attended in practice with the desired results. This is, beyond question, a bold and presumptuous doubt, inasmuch as many distinguished characters, called men of the world, long-headed customers, knowing dogs, shrewd fellows, capital hands at business, and the like, have made, and do daily make, this axiom their polar

star and compass. Still, the doubt may be gently insinuated. And in illustration it may be observed, that if Mr Brass, not being over-suspicious, had, without prying and listening, left his sister to manage the conference on their joint behalf, or prying and listening, had not been in such a mighty hurry to anticipate her (which he would not have been, but for his distrust and jealousy), he would probably have found himself much better off in the end. Thus, it will always happen that these men of the world, who go through it in armour, defend themselves from quite as much good as evil; to say nothing of the inconvenience and absurdity of mounting guard with a microscope at all times, and of wearing a coat of mail on the most innocent occasions.

The three gentlemen spoke together apart, for a few moments. At the end of their consultation, which was very brief, the Notary pointed to the writing materials on the table, and informed Mr Brass that if he wished to make any statement in writing, he had the opportunity of doing so. At the same time he felt bound to tell him that they would require his attendance, presently, before a justice of the peace, and that in what he did or said, he was guided entirely by his own discretion.

'Gentlemen,' said Brass, drawing off his glove, and crawling in spirit upon the ground before them, 'I will justify the tenderness with which I know I shall be treated; and as, without tenderness, I should, now that this discovery has been made, stand in the worst position of the three, you may depend upon it I will make a clean breast. Mr Witherden, sir, a kind of faintness is upon my spirits - if you would do me the favour to ring the bell and order up a glass of something warm and spicy, I shall, notwithstanding what has passed, have a melancholy pleasure in drinking your good health. I had hoped,' said Brass, looking round with a mournful smile, 'to have seen you three gentlemen, one day or another, with your legs under the mahogany in my humble parlour in the Marks. But hopes are fleeting. Dear me!'

Mr Brass found himself so exceedingly affected, at this point, that he could say or do nothing more until some refreshment arrived. Having partaken of it, pretty freely for one in his agitated state, he sat down to write.

The lovely Sarah, now with her arms folded, and now with her hands clasped behind her, paced the room with manly strides while her brother was thus employed, and sometimes stopped to pull out her snuff-box and bite the lid. She continued to pace up and down until she was quite tired, and then fell asleep on a chair near the door.

It has been since supposed, with some reason, that this slumber was a sham or feint, as she contrived to slip away unobserved in the dusk

of the afternoon. Whether this was an intentional and waking departure, or a somnambulist's leave-taking and walking in her sleep, may remain a subject of contention; but, on one point (and indeed the main one) all parties are agreed. In whatever state she walked away, she certainly did not walk back again.

Mention having been made of the dusk of the afternoon, it will be inferred that Mr Brass's task occupied some time in the completion. It was not finished until evening; but, being done at last, that worthy person and the three friends adjourned in a hackney-coach to the private office of a justice, who, giving Mr Brass a warm reception and detaining him in a secure place that he might insure to himself the pleasure of seeing him on the morrow, dismissed the others with the cheering assurance that a warrant could not fail to be granted next day for the apprehension of Mr Quilp, and that a proper application and statement of all the circumstances to the secretary of state (who was fortunately in town), would no doubt procure Kit's free pardon and liberation without delay.

And now, indeed, it seemed that Quilp's malignant career was drawing to a close, and that retribution, which often travels slowly - especially when heaviest - had tracked his footsteps with a sure and certain scent and was gaining on him fast. Unmindful of her stealthy tread, her victim holds his course in fancied triumph. Still at his heels she comes, and once afoot, is never turned aside!

Their business ended, the three gentlemen hastened back to the lodgings of Mr Swiveller, whom they found progressing so favourably in his recovery as to have been able to sit up for half an hour, and to have conversed with cheerfulness. Mrs Garland had gone home some time since, but Mr Abel was still sitting with him. After telling him all they had done, the two Mr Garlands and the single gentleman, as if by some previous understanding, took their leaves for the night, leaving the invalid alone with the Notary and the small servant.

'As you are so much better,' said Mr Witherden, sitting down at the bedside, 'I may venture to communicate to you a piece of news which has come to me professionally.'

The idea of any professional intelligence from a gentleman connected with legal matters, appeared to afford Richard any-thing but a pleasing anticipation. Perhaps he connected it in his own mind with one or two outstanding accounts, in reference to which he had already received divers threatening letters. His countenance fell as he replied,

'Certainly, sir. I hope it's not anything of a very disagreeable nature, though?'

'if I thought it so, I should choose some better time for communicating it,' replied the Notary. 'Let me tell you, first, that my friends who have been here to-day, know nothing of it, and that their kindness to you has been quite spontaneous and with no hope of return. It may do a thoughtless, careless man, good, to know that.'

Dick thanked him, and said he hoped it would.

'I have been making some inquiries about you,' said Mr Witherden, 'little thinking that I should find you under such circumstances as those which have brought us together. You are the nephew of Rebecca Swiveller, spinster, deceased, of Cheselbourne in Dorsetshire.'

'Deceased!' cried Dick.

'Deceased. If you had been another sort of nephew, you would have come into possession (so says the will, and I see no reason to doubt it) of five-and-twenty thousand pounds. As it is, you have fallen into an annuity of one hundred and fifty pounds a year; but I think I may congratulate you even upon that.'

'Sir,' said Dick, sobbing and laughing together, 'you may. For, please God, we'll make a scholar of the poor Marchioness yet! And she shall walk in silk attire, and siller have to spare, or may I never rise from this bed again!'