Chapter XVII - Somebody Turns Up

It has not occurred to me to mention Peggotty since I ran away; but, of course, I wrote her a letter almost as soon as I was housed at Dover, and another, and a longer letter, containing all particulars fully related, when my aunt took me formally under her protection. On my being settled at Doctor Strong's I wrote to her again, detailing my happy condition and prospects. I never could have derived anything like the pleasure from spending the money Mr Dick had given me, that I felt in sending a gold half-guinea to Peggotty, per post, enclosed in this last letter, to discharge the sum I had borrowed of her: in which epistle, not before, I mentioned about the young man with the donkey-cart.

To these communications Peggotty replied as promptly, if not as concisely, as a merchant's clerk. Her utmost powers of expression (which were certainly not great in ink) were exhausted in the attempt to write what she felt on the subject of my journey. Four sides of incoherent and interjectional beginnings of sentences, that had no end, except blots, were inadequate to afford her any relief. But the blots were more expressive to me than the best composition; for they showed me that Peggotty had been crying all over the paper, and what could I have desired more?

I made out, without much difficulty, that she could not take quite kindly to my aunt yet. The notice was too short after so long a prepossession the other way. We never knew a person, she wrote; but to think that Miss Betsey should seem to be so different from what she had been thought to be, was a Moral! - that was her word. She was evidently still afraid of Miss Betsey, for she sent her grateful duty to her but timidly; and she was evidently afraid of me, too, and entertained the probability of my running away again soon: if I might judge from the repeated hints she threw out, that the coach-fare to Yarmouth was always to be had of her for the asking.

She gave me one piece of intelligence which affected me very much, namely, that there had been a sale of the furniture at our old home, and that Mr and Miss Murdstone were gone away, and the house was shut up, to be let or sold. God knows I had no part in it while they remained there, but it pained me to think of the dear old place as altogether abandoned; of the weeds growing tall in the garden, and the fallen leaves lying thick and wet upon the paths. I imagined how the winds of winter would howl round it, how the cold rain would beat upon the window-glass, how the moon would make ghosts on the walls of the empty rooms, watching their solitude all night. I thought afresh of the grave in the churchyard, underneath the tree: and it seemed as if the house were dead too, now, and all connected with my father and mother were faded away.

There was no other news in Peggotty's letters. Mr Barkis was an excellent husband, she said, though still a little near; but we all had our faults, and she had plenty (though I am sure I don't know what they were); and he sent his duty, and my little bedroom was always ready for me. Mr Peggotty was well, and Ham was well, and Mrs Gummidge was but poorly, and little Em'ly wouldn't send her love, but said that Peggotty might send it, if she liked.

All this intelligence I dutifully imparted to my aunt, only reserving to myself the mention of little Em'ly, to whom I instinctively felt that she would not very tenderly incline. While I was yet new at Doctor Strong's, she made several excursions over to Canterbury to see me, and always at unseasonable hours: with the view, I suppose, of taking me by surprise. But, finding me well employed, and bearing a good character, and hearing on all hands that I rose fast in the school, she soon discontinued these visits. I saw her on a Saturday, every third or fourth week, when I went over to Dover for a treat; and I saw Mr Dick every alternate Wednesday, when he arrived by stage-coach at noon, to stay until next morning.

On these occasions Mr Dick never travelled without a leathern writing-desk, containing a supply of stationery and the Memorial; in relation to which document he had a notion that time was beginning to press now, and that it really must be got out of hand.

Mr Dick was very partial to gingerbread. To render his visits the more agreeable, my aunt had instructed me to open a credit for him at a cake shop, which was hampered with the stipulation that he should not be served with more than one shilling's-worth in the course of any one day. This, and the reference of all his little bills at the county inn where he slept, to my aunt, before they were paid, induced me to suspect that he was only allowed to rattle his money, and not to spend it. I found on further investigation that this was so, or at least there was an agreement between him and my aunt that he should account to her for all his disbursements. As he had no idea of deceiving her, and always desired to please her, he was thus made chary of launching into expense. On this point, as well as on all other possible points, Mr Dick was convinced that my aunt was the wisest and most wonderful of women; as he repeatedly told me with infinite secrecy, and always in a whisper.

'Trotwood,' said Mr Dick, with an air of mystery, after imparting this confidence to me, one Wednesday; 'who's the man that hides near our house and frightens her?'

'Frightens my aunt, sir?'

Mr Dick nodded. 'I thought nothing would have frightened her,' he said, 'for she's -' here he whispered softly, 'don't mention it - the wisest and most wonderful of women.' Having said which, he drew back, to observe the effect which this description of her made upon me.

'The first time he came,' said Mr Dick, 'was- let me see- sixteen hundred and forty-nine was the date of King Charles's execution. I think you said sixteen hundred and forty-nine?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I don't know how it can be,' said Mr Dick, sorely puzzled and shaking his head. 'I don't think I am as old as that.'

'Was it in that year that the man appeared, sir?' I asked.

'Why, really' said Mr Dick, 'I don't see how it can have been in that year, Trotwood. Did you get that date out of history?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I suppose history never lies, does it?' said Mr Dick, with a gleam of hope.

'Oh dear, no, sir!' I replied, most decisively. I was ingenuous and young, and I thought so.

'I can't make it out,' said Mr Dick, shaking his head. 'There's something wrong, somewhere. However, it was very soon after the mistake was made of putting some of the trouble out of King Charles's head into my head, that the man first came. I was walking out with Miss Trotwood after tea, just at dark, and there he was, close to our house.'

'Walking about?' I inquired.

'Walking about?' repeated Mr Dick. 'Let me see, I must recollect a bit. N-no, no; he was not walking about.'

I asked, as the shortest way to get at it, what he WAS doing.

'Well, he wasn't there at all,' said Mr Dick, 'until he came up behind her, and whispered. Then she turned round and fainted, and I stood still and looked at him, and he walked away; but that he should have been hiding ever since (in the ground or somewhere), is the most extraordinary thing!'

'HAS he been hiding ever since?' I asked.

'To be sure he has,' retorted Mr Dick, nodding his head gravely. 'Never came out, till last night! We were walking last night, and he came up behind her again, and I knew him again.'

'And did he frighten my aunt again?'

'All of a shiver,' said Mr Dick, counterfeiting that affection and making his teeth chatter. 'Held by the palings. Cried. But, Trotwood, come here,' getting me close to him, that he might whisper very softly; 'why did she give him money, boy, in the moonlight?'

'He was a beggar, perhaps.'

Mr Dick shook his head, as utterly renouncing the suggestion; and having replied a great many times, and with great confidence, 'No beggar, no beggar, no beggar, sir!' went on to say, that from his window he had afterwards, and late at night, seen my aunt give this person money outside the garden rails in the moonlight, who then slunk away - into the ground again, as he thought probable - and was seen no more: while my aunt came hurriedly and secretly back into the house, and had, even that morning, been quite different from her usual self; which preyed on Mr Dick's mind.

I had not the least belief, in the outset of this story, that the unknown was anything but a delusion of Mr Dick's, and one of the line of that ill-fated Prince who occasioned him so much difficulty; but after some reflection I began to entertain the question whether an attempt, or threat of an attempt, might have been twice made to take poor Mr Dick himself from under my aunt's protection, and whether my aunt, the strength of whose kind feeling towards him I knew from herself, might have been induced to pay a price for his peace and quiet. As I was already much attached to Mr Dick, and very solicitous for his welfare, my fears favoured this supposition; and for a long time his Wednesday hardly ever came round, without my entertaining a misgiving that he would not be on the coach-box as usual. There he always appeared, however, grey-headed, laughing, and happy; and he never had anything more to tell of the man who could frighten my aunt.

These Wednesdays were the happiest days of Mr Dick's life; they were far from being the least happy of mine. He soon became known to every boy in the school; and though he never took an active part in any game but kite-flying, was as deeply interested in all our sports as anyone among us. How often have I seen him, intent upon a match at marbles or pegtop, looking on with a face of unutterable interest, and hardly breathing at the critical times! How often, at hare and hounds,

have I seen him mounted on a little knoll, cheering the whole field on to action, and waving his hat above his grey head, oblivious of King Charles the Martyr's head, and all belonging to it! How many a summer hour have I known to be but blissful minutes to him in the cricket-field! How many winter days have I seen him, standing blue-nosed, in the snow and east wind, looking at the boys going down the long slide, and clapping his worsted gloves in rapture!

He was an universal favourite, and his ingenuity in little things was transcendent. He could cut oranges into such devices as none of us had an idea of. He could make a boat out of anything, from a skewer upwards. He could turn cramp-bones into chessmen; fashion Roman chariots from old court cards; make spoked wheels out of cotton reels, and bird-cages of old wire. But he was greatest of all, perhaps, in the articles of string and straw; with which we were all persuaded he could do anything that could be done by hands.

Mr Dick's renown was not long confined to us. After a few Wednesdays, Doctor Strong himself made some inquiries of me about him, and I told him all my aunt had told me; which interested the Doctor so much that he requested, on the occasion of his next visit, to be presented to him. This ceremony I performed; and the Doctor begging Mr Dick, whensoever he should not find me at the coach office, to come on there, and rest himself until our morning's work was over, it soon passed into a custom for Mr Dick to come on as a matter of course, and, if we were a little late, as often happened on a Wednesday, to walk about the courtyard, waiting for me. Here he made the acquaintance of the Doctor's beautiful young wife (paler than formerly, all this time; more rarely seen by me or anyone, I think; and not so gay, but not less beautiful), and so became more and more familiar by degrees, until, at last, he would come into the school and wait. He always sat in a particular corner, on a particular stool, which was called 'Dick', after him; here he would sit, with his grey head bent forward, attentively listening to whatever might be going on, with a profound veneration for the learning he had never been able to acquire.

This veneration Mr Dick extended to the Doctor, whom he thought the most subtle and accomplished philosopher of any age. It was long before Mr Dick ever spoke to him otherwise than bareheaded; and even when he and the Doctor had struck up quite a friendship, and would walk together by the hour, on that side of the courtyard which was known among us as The Doctor's Walk, Mr Dick would pull off his hat at intervals to show his respect for wisdom and knowledge. How it ever came about that the Doctor began to read out scraps of the famous Dictionary, in these walks, I never knew; perhaps he felt it all the same, at first, as reading to himself. However, it passed into a custom too; and Mr Dick, listening with a face shining with pride and

pleasure, in his heart of hearts believed the Dictionary to be the most delightful book in the world.

As I think of them going up and down before those schoolroom windows - the Doctor reading with his complacent smile, an occasional flourish of the manuscript, or grave motion of his head; and Mr Dick listening, enchained by interest, with his poor wits calmly wandering God knows where, upon the wings of hard words - I think of it as one of the pleasantest things, in a quiet way, that I have ever seen. I feel as if they might go walking to and fro for ever, and the world might somehow be the better for it - as if a thousand things it makes a noise about, were not one half so good for it, or me.

Agnes was one of Mr Dick's friends, very soon; and in often coming to the house, he made acquaintance with Uriah. The friendship between himself and me increased continually, and it was maintained on this odd footing: that, while Mr Dick came professedly to look after me as my guardian, he always consulted me in any little matter of doubt that arose, and invariably guided himself by my advice; not only having a high respect for my native sagacity, but considering that I inherited a good deal from my aunt.

One Thursday morning, when I was about to walk with Mr Dick from the hotel to the coach office before going back to school (for we had an hour's school before breakfast), I met Uriah in the street, who reminded me of the promise I had made to take tea with himself and his mother: adding, with a writhe, 'But I didn't expect you to keep it, Master Copperfield, we're so very umble.'

I really had not yet been able to make up my mind whether I liked Uriah or detested him; and I was very doubtful about it still, as I stood looking him in the face in the street. But I felt it quite an affront to be supposed proud, and said I only wanted to be asked.

'Oh, if that's all, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah, 'and it really isn't our umbleness that prevents you, will you come this evening? But if it is our umbleness, I hope you won't mind owning to it, Master Copperfield; for we are well aware of our condition.'

I said I would mention it to Mr Wickfield, and if he approved, as I had no doubt he would, I would come with pleasure. So, at six o'clock that evening, which was one of the early office evenings, I announced myself as ready, to Uriah.

'Mother will be proud, indeed,' he said, as we walked away together. 'Or she would be proud, if it wasn't sinful, Master Copperfield.'

'Yet you didn't mind supposing I was proud this morning,' I returned.

'Oh dear, no, Master Copperfield!' returned Uriah. 'Oh, believe me, no! Such a thought never came into my head! I shouldn't have deemed it at all proud if you had thought US too umble for you. Because we are so very umble.'

'Have you been studying much law lately?' I asked, to change the subject.

'Oh, Master Copperfield,' he said, with an air of self-denial, 'my reading is hardly to be called study. I have passed an hour or two in the evening, sometimes, with Mr Tidd.'

'Rather hard, I suppose?' said I. 'He is hard to me sometimes,' returned Uriah. 'But I don't know what he might be to a gifted person.'

After beating a little tune on his chin as he walked on, with the two forefingers of his skeleton right hand, he added:

'There are expressions, you see, Master Copperfield - Latin words and terms - in Mr Tidd, that are trying to a reader of my umble attainments.'

'Would you like to be taught Latin?' I said briskly. 'I will teach it you with pleasure, as I learn it.'

'Oh, thank you, Master Copperfield,' he answered, shaking his head. 'I am sure it's very kind of you to make the offer, but I am much too umble to accept it.'

'What nonsense, Uriah!'

'Oh, indeed you must excuse me, Master Copperfield! I am greatly obliged, and I should like it of all things, I assure you; but I am far too umble. There are people enough to tread upon me in my lowly state, without my doing outrage to their feelings by possessing learning. Learning ain't for me. A person like myself had better not aspire. If he is to get on in life, he must get on umbly, Master Copperfield!'

I never saw his mouth so wide, or the creases in his cheeks so deep, as when he delivered himself of these sentiments: shaking his head all the time, and writhing modestly.

'I think you are wrong, Uriah,' I said. 'I dare say there are several things that I could teach you, if you would like to learn them.'

'Oh, I don't doubt that, Master Copperfield,' he answered; 'not in the least. But not being umble yourself, you don't judge well, perhaps, for

them that are. I won't provoke my betters with knowledge, thank you. I'm much too umble. Here is my umble dwelling, Master Copperfield!'

We entered a low, old-fashioned room, walked straight into from the street, and found there Mrs Heep, who was the dead image of Uriah, only short. She received me with the utmost humility, and apologized to me for giving her son a kiss, observing that, lowly as they were, they had their natural affections, which they hoped would give no offence to anyone. It was a perfectly decent room, half parlour and half kitchen, but not at all a snug room. The tea-things were set upon the table, and the kettle was boiling on the hob. There was a chest of drawers with an escritoire top, for Uriah to read or write at of an evening; there was Uriah's blue bag lying down and vomiting papers; there was a company of Uriah's books commanded by Mr Tidd; there was a corner cupboard: and there were the usual articles of furniture. I don't remember that any individual object had a bare, pinched, spare look; but I do remember that the whole place had.

It was perhaps a part of Mrs Heep's humility, that she still wore weeds. Notwithstanding the lapse of time that had occurred since Mr Heep's decease, she still wore weeds. I think there was some compromise in the cap; but otherwise she was as weedy as in the early days of her mourning.

'This is a day to be remembered, my Uriah, I am sure,' said Mrs Heep, making the tea, 'when Master Copperfield pays us a visit.'

'I said you'd think so, mother,' said Uriah.

'If I could have wished father to remain among us for any reason,' said Mrs Heep, 'it would have been, that he might have known his company this afternoon.'

I felt embarrassed by these compliments; but I was sensible, too, of being entertained as an honoured guest, and I thought Mrs Heep an agreeable woman.

'My Uriah,' said Mrs Heep, 'has looked forward to this, sir, a long while. He had his fears that our umbleness stood in the way, and I joined in them myself. Umble we are, umble we have been, umble we shall ever be,' said Mrs Heep.

'I am sure you have no occasion to be so, ma'am,' I said, 'unless you like.'

'Thank you, sir,' retorted Mrs Heep. 'We know our station and are thankful in it.'

I found that Mrs Heep gradually got nearer to me, and that Uriah gradually got opposite to me, and that they respectfully plied me with the choicest of the eatables on the table. There was nothing particularly choice there, to be sure; but I took the will for the deed, and felt that they were very attentive. Presently they began to talk about aunts, and then I told them about mine; and about fathers and mothers, and then I told them about mine; and then Mrs Heep began to talk about fathers-in-law, and then I began to tell her about mine - but stopped, because my aunt had advised me to observe a silence on that subject. A tender young cork, however, would have had no more chance against a pair of corkscrews, or a tender young tooth against a pair of dentists, or a little shuttlecock against two battledores, than I had against Uriah and Mrs Heep. They did just what they liked with me; and wormed things out of me that I had no desire to tell, with a certainty I blush to think of, the more especially, as in my juvenile frankness, I took some credit to myself for being so confidential and felt that I was quite the patron of my two respectful entertainers.

They were very fond of one another: that was certain. I take it, that had its effect upon me, as a touch of nature; but the skill with which the one followed up whatever the other said, was a touch of art which I was still less proof against. When there was nothing more to be got out of me about myself (for on the Murdstone and Grinby life, and on my journey, I was dumb), they began about Mr Wickfield and Agnes. Uriah threw the ball to Mrs Heep, Mrs Heep caught it and threw it back to Uriah, Uriah kept it up a little while, then sent it back to Mrs Heep, and so they went on tossing it about until I had no idea who had got it, and was quite bewildered. The ball itself was always changing too. Now it was Mr Wickfield, now Agnes, now the excellence of Mr Wickfield, now my admiration of Agnes; now the extent of Mr Wickfield's business and resources, now our domestic life after dinner; now, the wine that Mr Wickfield took, the reason why he took it, and the pity that it was he took so much; now one thing, now another, then everything at once; and all the time, without appearing to speak very often, or to do anything but sometimes encourage them a little, for fear they should be overcome by their humility and the honour of my company, I found myself perpetually letting out something or other that I had no business to let out and seeing the effect of it in the twinkling of Uriah's dinted nostrils.

I had begun to be a little uncomfortable, and to wish myself well out of the visit, when a figure coming down the street passed the door - it stood open to air the room, which was warm, the weather being close for the time of year - came back again, looked in, and walked in, exclaiming loudly, 'Copperfield! Is it possible?'

It was Mr Micawber! It was Mr Micawber, with his eye-glass, and his walking-stick, and his shirt-collar, and his genteel air, and the condescending roll in his voice, all complete!

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr Micawber, putting out his hand, 'this is indeed a meeting which is calculated to impress the mind with a sense of the instability and uncertainty of all human - in short, it is a most extraordinary meeting. Walking along the street, reflecting upon the probability of something turning up (of which I am at present rather sanguine), I find a young but valued friend turn up, who is connected with the most eventful period of my life; I may say, with the turning-point of my existence. Copperfield, my dear fellow, how do you do?'

I cannot say - I really cannot say - that I was glad to see Mr Micawber there; but I was glad to see him too, and shook hands with him, heartily, inquiring how Mrs Micawber was.

'Thank you,' said Mr Micawber, waving his hand as of old, and settling his chin in his shirt-collar. 'She is tolerably convalescent. The twins no longer derive their sustenance from Nature's founts - in short,' said Mr Micawber, in one of his bursts of confidence, 'they are weaned - and Mrs Micawber is, at present, my travelling companion. She will be rejoiced, Copperfield, to renew her acquaintance with one who has proved himself in all respects a worthy minister at the sacred altar of friendship.'

I said I should be delighted to see her.

'You are very good,' said Mr Micawber.

Mr Micawber then smiled, settled his chin again, and looked about him.

'I have discovered my friend Copperfield,' said Mr Micawber genteelly, and without addressing himself particularly to anyone, 'not in solitude, but partaking of a social meal in company with a widow lady, and one who is apparently her offspring - in short,' said Mr Micawber, in another of his bursts of confidence, 'her son. I shall esteem it an honour to be presented.'

I could do no less, under these circumstances, than make Mr Micawber known to Uriah Heep and his mother; which I accordingly did. As they abased themselves before him, Mr Micawber took a seat, and waved his hand in his most courtly manner.

'Any friend of my friend Copperfield's,' said Mr Micawber, 'has a personal claim upon myself.'

'We are too umble, sir,' said Mrs Heep, 'my son and me, to be the friends of Master Copperfield. He has been so good as take his tea with us, and we are thankful to him for his company, also to you, sir, for your notice.'

'Ma'am,' returned Mr Micawber, with a bow, 'you are very obliging: and what are you doing, Copperfield? Still in the wine trade?'

I was excessively anxious to get Mr Micawber away; and replied, with my hat in my hand, and a very red face, I have no doubt, that I was a pupil at Doctor Strong's.

'A pupil?' said Mr Micawber, raising his eyebrows. 'I am extremely happy to hear it. Although a mind like my friend Copperfield's' - to Uriah and Mrs Heep - 'does not require that cultivation which, without his knowledge of men and things, it would require, still it is a rich soil teeming with latent vegetation - in short,' said Mr Micawber, smiling, in another burst of confidence, 'it is an intellect capable of getting up the classics to any extent.'

Uriah, with his long hands slowly twining over one another, made a ghastly writhe from the waist upwards, to express his concurrence in this estimation of me.

'Shall we go and see Mrs Micawber, sir?' I said, to get Mr Micawber away.

'If you will do her that favour, Copperfield,' replied Mr Micawber, rising. 'I have no scruple in saying, in the presence of our friends here, that I am a man who has, for some years, contended against the pressure of pecuniary difficulties.' I knew he was certain to say something of this kind; he always would be so boastful about his difficulties. 'Sometimes I have risen superior to my difficulties. Sometimes my difficulties have - in short, have floored me. There have been times when I have administered a succession of facers to them; there have been times when they have been too many for me, and I have given in, and said to Mrs Micawber, in the words of Cato, 'Plato, thou reasonest well. It's all up now. I can show fight no more.' But at no time of my life,' said Mr Micawber, 'have I enjoyed a higher degree of satisfaction than in pouring my griefs (if I may describe difficulties, chiefly arising out of warrants of attorney and promissory notes at two and four months, by that word) into the bosom of my friend Copperfield.'

Mr Micawber closed this handsome tribute by saying, 'Mr Heep! Good evening. Mrs Heep! Your servant,' and then walking out with me in his most fashionable manner, making a good deal of noise on the pavement with his shoes, and humming a tune as we went.

It was a little inn where Mr Micawber put up, and he occupied a little room in it, partitioned off from the commercial room, and strongly flavoured with tobacco-smoke. I think it was over the kitchen, because a warm greasy smell appeared to come up through the chinks in the floor, and there was a flabby perspiration on the walls. I know it was near the bar, on account of the smell of spirits and jingling of glasses. Here, recumbent on a small sofa, underneath a picture of a race-horse, with her head close to the fire, and her feet pushing the mustard off the dumb-waiter at the other end of the room, was Mrs Micawber, to whom Mr Micawber entered first, saying, 'My dear, allow me to introduce to you a pupil of Doctor Strong's.'

I noticed, by the by, that although Mr Micawber was just as much confused as ever about my age and standing, he always remembered, as a genteel thing, that I was a pupil of Doctor Strong's.

Mrs Micawber was amazed, but very glad to see me. I was very glad to see her too, and, after an affectionate greeting on both sides, sat down on the small sofa near her.

'My dear,' said Mr Micawber, 'if you will mention to Copperfield what our present position is, which I have no doubt he will like to know, I will go and look at the paper the while, and see whether anything turns up among the advertisements.'

'I thought you were at Plymouth, ma'am,' I said to Mrs Micawber, as he went out.

'My dear Master Copperfield,' she replied, 'we went to Plymouth.'

'To be on the spot,' I hinted.

'Just so,' said Mrs Micawber. 'To be on the spot. But, the truth is, talent is not wanted in the Custom House. The local influence of my family was quite unavailing to obtain any employment in that department, for a man of Mr Micawber's abilities. They would rather NOT have a man of Mr Micawber's abilities. He would only show the deficiency of the others. Apart from which,' said Mrs Micawber, 'I will not disguise from you, my dear Master Copperfield, that when that branch of my family which is settled in Plymouth, became aware that Mr Micawber was accompanied by myself, and by little Wilkins and his sister, and by the twins, they did not receive him with that ardour which he might have expected, being so newly released from captivity. In fact,' said Mrs Micawber, lowering her voice, - 'this is between ourselves - our reception was cool.'

'Dear me!' I said.

'Yes,' said Mrs Micawber. 'It is truly painful to contemplate mankind in such an aspect, Master Copperfield, but our reception was, decidedly, cool. There is no doubt about it. In fact, that branch of my family which is settled in Plymouth became quite personal to Mr Micawber, before we had been there a week.'

I said, and thought, that they ought to be ashamed of themselves.

'Still, so it was,' continued Mrs Micawber. 'Under such circumstances, what could a man of Mr Micawber's spirit do? But one obvious course was left. To borrow, of that branch of my family, the money to return to London, and to return at any sacrifice.'

'Then you all came back again, ma'am?' I said.

'We all came back again,' replied Mrs Micawber. 'Since then, I have consulted other branches of my family on the course which it is most expedient for Mr Micawber to take - for I maintain that he must take some course, Master Copperfield,' said Mrs Micawber, argumentatively. 'It is clear that a family of six, not including a domestic, cannot live upon air.'

'Certainly, ma'am,' said I.

'The opinion of those other branches of my family,' pursued Mrs Micawber, 'is, that Mr Micawber should immediately turn his attention to coals.'

'To what, ma'am?'

'To coals,' said Mrs Micawber. 'To the coal trade. Mr Micawber was induced to think, on inquiry, that there might be an opening for a man of his talent in the Medway Coal Trade. Then, as Mr Micawber very properly said, the first step to be taken clearly was, to come and see the Medway. Which we came and saw. I say 'we', Master Copperfield; for I never will,' said Mrs Micawber with emotion, 'I never will desert Mr Micawber.'

I murmured my admiration and approbation.

'We came,' repeated Mrs Micawber, 'and saw the Medway. My opinion of the coal trade on that river is, that it may require talent, but that it certainly requires capital. Talent, Mr Micawber has; capital, Mr Micawber has not. We saw, I think, the greater part of the Medway; and that is my individual conclusion. Being so near here, Mr Micawber was of opinion that it would be rash not to come on, and see the Cathedral. Firstly, on account of its being so well worth seeing, and our never having seen it; and secondly, on account of the great

probability of something turning up in a cathedral town. We have been here,' said Mrs Micawber, 'three days. Nothing has, as yet, turned up; and it may not surprise you, my dear Master Copperfield, so much as it would a stranger, to know that we are at present waiting for a remittance from London, to discharge our pecuniary obligations at this hotel. Until the arrival of that remittance,' said Mrs Micawber with much feeling, 'I am cut off from my home (I allude to lodgings in Pentonville), from my boy and girl, and from my twins.'

I felt the utmost sympathy for Mr and Mrs Micawber in this anxious extremity, and said as much to Mr Micawber, who now returned: adding that I only wished I had money enough, to lend them the amount they needed. Mr Micawber's answer expressed the disturbance of his mind. He said, shaking hands with me, 'Copperfield, you are a true friend; but when the worst comes to the worst, no man is without a friend who is possessed of shaving materials.' At this dreadful hint Mrs Micawber threw her arms round Mr Micawber's neck and entreated him to be calm. He wept; but so far recovered, almost immediately, as to ring the bell for the waiter, and bespeak a hot kidney pudding and a plate of shrimps for breakfast in the morning.

When I took my leave of them, they both pressed me so much to come and dine before they went away, that I could not refuse. But, as I knew I could not come next day, when I should have a good deal to prepare in the evening, Mr Micawber arranged that he would call at Doctor Strong's in the course of the morning (having a presentiment that the remittance would arrive by that post), and propose the day after, if it would suit me better. Accordingly I was called out of school next forenoon, and found Mr Micawber in the parlour; who had called to say that the dinner would take place as proposed. When I asked him if the remittance had come, he pressed my hand and departed.

As I was looking out of window that same evening, it surprised me, and made me rather uneasy, to see Mr Micawber and Uriah Heep walk past, arm in arm: Uriah humbly sensible of the honour that was done him, and Mr Micawber taking a bland delight in extending his patronage to Uriah. But I was still more surprised, when I went to the little hotel next day at the appointed dinner-hour, which was four o'clock, to find, from what Mr Micawber said, that he had gone home with Uriah, and had drunk brandy-and-water at Mrs Heep's.

'And I'll tell you what, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr Micawber, 'your friend Heep is a young fellow who might be attorney-general. If I had known that young man, at the period when my difficulties came to a crisis, all I can say is, that I believe my creditors would have been a great deal better managed than they were.'

I hardly understood how this could have been, seeing that Mr Micawber had paid them nothing at all as it was; but I did not like to ask. Neither did I like to say, that I hoped he had not been too communicative to Uriah; or to inquire if they had talked much about me. I was afraid of hurting Mr Micawber's feelings, or, at all events, Mrs Micawber's, she being very sensitive; but I was uncomfortable about it, too, and often thought about it afterwards.

We had a beautiful little dinner. Quite an elegant dish of fish; the kidney-end of a loin of veal, roasted; fried sausage-meat; a partridge, and a pudding. There was wine, and there was strong ale; and after dinner Mrs Micawber made us a bowl of hot punch with her own hands.

Mr Micawber was uncommonly convivial. I never saw him such good company. He made his face shine with the punch, so that it looked as if it had been varnished all over. He got cheerfully sentimental about the town, and proposed success to it; observing that Mrs Micawber and himself had been made extremely snug and comfortable there and that he never should forget the agreeable hours they had passed in Canterbury. He proposed me afterwards; and he, and Mrs Micawber, and I, took a review of our past acquaintance, in the course of which we sold the property all over again. Then I proposed Mrs Micawber: or, at least, said, modestly, 'If you'll allow me, Mrs Micawber, I shall now have the pleasure of drinking your health, ma'am.' On which Mr Micawber delivered an eulogium on Mrs Micawber's character, and said she had ever been his guide, philosopher, and friend, and that he would recommend me, when I came to a marrying time of life, to marry such another woman, if such another woman could be found.

As the punch disappeared, Mr Micawber became still more friendly and convivial. Mrs Micawber's spirits becoming elevated, too, we sang 'Auld Lang Syne'. When we came to 'Here's a hand, my trusty frere', we all joined hands round the table; and when we declared we would 'take a right gude Willie Waught', and hadn't the least idea what it meant, we were really affected.

In a word, I never saw anybody so thoroughly jovial as Mr Micawber was, down to the very last moment of the evening, when I took a hearty farewell of himself and his amiable wife. Consequently, I was not prepared, at seven o'clock next morning, to receive the following communication, dated half past nine in the evening; a quarter of an hour after I had left him: -

'My DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,

'The die is cast - all is over. Hiding the ravages of care with a sickly mask of mirth, I have not informed you, this evening, that there is no

hope of the remittance! Under these circumstances, alike humiliating to endure, humiliating to contemplate, and humiliating to relate, I have discharged the pecuniary liability contracted at this establishment, by giving a note of hand, made payable fourteen days after date, at my residence, Pentonville, London. When it becomes due, it will not be taken up. The result is destruction. The bolt is impending, and the tree must fall.

'Let the wretched man who now addresses you, my dear Copperfield, be a beacon to you through life. He writes with that intention, and in that hope. If he could think himself of so much use, one gleam of day might, by possibility, penetrate into the cheerless dungeon of his remaining existence - though his longevity is, at present (to say the least of it), extremely problematical.

'This is the last communication, my dear Copperfield, you will ever receive

'From

'The

'Beggared Outcast,

'WILKINS MICAWBER.'

I was so shocked by the contents of this heart-rending letter, that I ran off directly towards the little hotel with the intention of taking it on my way to Doctor Strong's, and trying to soothe Mr Micawber with a word of comfort. But, half-way there, I met the London coach with Mr and Mrs Micawber up behind; Mr Micawber, the very picture of tranquil enjoyment, smiling at Mrs Micawber's conversation, eating walnuts out of a paper bag, with a bottle sticking out of his breast pocket. As they did not see me, I thought it best, all things considered, not to see them. So, with a great weight taken off my mind, I turned into a by-street that was the nearest way to school, and felt, upon the whole, relieved that they were gone; though I still liked them very much, nevertheless.