

## Chapter LXIII - A Visitor

What I have purposed to record is nearly finished; but there is yet an incident conspicuous in my memory, on which it often rests with delight, and without which one thread in the web I have spun would have a ravelled end.

I had advanced in fame and fortune, my domestic joy was perfect, I had been married ten happy years. Agnes and I were sitting by the fire, in our house in London, one night in spring, and three of our children were playing in the room, when I was told that a stranger wished to see me.

He had been asked if he came on business, and had answered No; he had come for the pleasure of seeing me, and had come a long way. He was an old man, my servant said, and looked like a farmer.

As this sounded mysterious to the children, and moreover was like the beginning of a favourite story Agnes used to tell them, introductory to the arrival of a wicked old Fairy in a cloak who hated everybody, it produced some commotion. One of our boys laid his head in his mother's lap to be out of harm's way, and little Agnes (our eldest child) left her doll in a chair to represent her, and thrust out her little heap of golden curls from between the window-curtains, to see what happened next.

'Let him come in here!' said I.

There soon appeared, pausing in the dark doorway as he entered, a hale, grey-haired old man. Little Agnes, attracted by his looks, had run to bring him in, and I had not yet clearly seen his face, when my wife, starting up, cried out to me, in a pleased and agitated voice, that it was Mr Peggotty!

It WAS Mr Peggotty. An old man now, but in a ruddy, hearty, strong old age. When our first emotion was over, and he sat before the fire with the children on his knees, and the blaze shining on his face, he looked, to me, as vigorous and robust, withal as handsome, an old man, as ever I had seen.

'Mas'r Davy,' said he. And the old name in the old tone fell so naturally on my ear! 'Mas'r Davy, 'tis a joyful hour as I see you, once more, 'long with your own trew wife!'

'A joyful hour indeed, old friend!' cried I.

'And these heer pretty ones,' said Mr Peggotty. 'To look at these heer flowers! Why, Mas'r Davy, you was but the heighth of the littlest of

these, when I first see you! When Em'ly warn't no bigger, and our poor lad were BUT a lad!

'Time has changed me more than it has changed you since then,' said I. 'But let these dear rogues go to bed; and as no house in England but this must hold you, tell me where to send for your luggage (is the old black bag among it, that went so far, I wonder!), and then, over a glass of Yarmouth grog, we will have the tidings of ten years!'

'Are you alone?' asked Agnes.

'Yes, ma'am,' he said, kissing her hand, 'quite alone.'

We sat him between us, not knowing how to give him welcome enough; and as I began to listen to his old familiar voice, I could have fancied he was still pursuing his long journey in search of his darling niece.

'It's a mort of water,' said Mr Peggotty, 'fur to come across, and on'y stay a matter of fower weeks. But water ('specially when 'tis salt) comes nat'ral to me; and friends is dear, and I am heer. - Which is verse,' said Mr Peggotty, surprised to find it out, 'though I hadn't such intentions.'

'Are you going back those many thousand miles, so soon?' asked Agnes.

'Yes, ma'am,' he returned. 'I giv the promise to Em'ly, afore I come away. You see, I doen't grow younger as the years comes round, and if I hadn't sailed as 'twas, most like I shouldn't never have done 't. And it's allus been on my mind, as I must come and see Mas'r Davy and your own sweet blooming self, in your wedded happiness, afore I got to be too old.'

He looked at us, as if he could never feast his eyes on us sufficiently. Agnes laughingly put back some scattered locks of his grey hair, that he might see us better.

'And now tell us,' said I, 'everything relating to your fortunes.'

'Our fortunes, Mas'r Davy,' he rejoined, 'is soon told. We haven't fared nohows, but fared to thrive. We've allus thrived. We've worked as we ought to 't, and maybe we lived a leetle hard at first or so, but we have allus thrived. What with sheep-farming, and what with stock-farming, and what with one thing and what with t'other, we are as well to do, as well could be. Theer's been kiender a blessing fell upon us,' said Mr Peggotty, reverentially inclining his head, 'and we've done nowt but

prosper. That is, in the long run. If not yesterday, why then today. If not today, why then tomorrow.'

'And Emily?' said Agnes and I, both together.

'Em'ly,' said he, 'arter you left her, ma'am - and I never heerd her saying of her prayers at night, t'other side the canvas screen, when we was settled in the Bush, but what I heerd your name - and arter she and me lost sight of Mas'r Davy, that theer shining sundown - was that low, at first, that, if she had know'd then what Mas'r Davy kep from us so kind and thowtful, 'tis my opinion she'd have drooped away. But theer was some poor folks aboard as had illness among 'em, and she took care of them; and theer was the children in our company, and she took care of them; and so she got to be busy, and to be doing good, and that helped her.'

'When did she first hear of it?' I asked.

'I kep it from her arter I heerd on 't,' said Mr Peggotty, 'going on nigh a year. We was living then in a solitary place, but among the beautifullest trees, and with the roses a-covering our Beein to the roof. Theer come along one day, when I was out a-working on the land, a traveller from our own Norfolk or Suffolk in England (I doen't rightly mind which), and of course we took him in, and giv him to eat and drink, and made him welcome. We all do that, all the colony over. He'd got an old newspaper with him, and some other account in print of the storm. That's how she know'd it. When I came home at night, I found she know'd it.'

He dropped his voice as he said these words, and the gravity I so well remembered overspread his face.

'Did it change her much?' we asked.

'Aye, for a good long time,' he said, shaking his head; 'if not to this present hour. But I think the solitoode done her good. And she had a deal to mind in the way of poultry and the like, and minded of it, and come through. I wonder,' he said thoughtfully, 'if you could see my Em'ly now, Mas'r Davy, whether you'd know her!'

'Is she so altered?' I inquired.

'I doen't know. I see her ev'ry day, and doen't know; But, odd-times, I have thowt so. A slight figure,' said Mr Peggotty, looking at the fire, 'kiender worn; soft, sorrowful, blue eyes; a delicate face; a pritty head, leaning a little down; a quiet voice and way - timid a'most. That's Em'ly!'

We silently observed him as he sat, still looking at the fire.

'Some thinks,' he said, 'as her affection was ill-bestowed; some, as her marriage was broken off by death. No one knows how 'tis. She might have married well, a mort of times, 'but, uncle,' she says to me, 'that's gone for ever.' Cheerful along with me; retired when others is by; fond of going any distance fur to teach a child, or fur to tend a sick person, or fur to do some kindness tow'rds a young girl's wedding (and she's done a many, but has never seen one); fondly loving of her uncle; patient; liked by young and old; sowl out by all that has any trouble. That's Em'ly!'

He drew his hand across his face, and with a half-suppressed sigh looked up from the fire.

'Is Martha with you yet?' I asked.

'Martha,' he replied, 'got married, Mas'r Davy, in the second year. A young man, a farm-labourer, as come by us on his way to market with his mas'r's drays - a journey of over five hundred mile, theer and back - made offers fur to take her fur his wife (wives is very scarce theer), and then to set up fur their two selves in the Bush. She spoke to me fur to tell him her trew story. I did. They was married, and they live fower hundred mile away from any voices but their own and the singing birds.'

'Mrs Gummidge?' I suggested.

It was a pleasant key to touch, for Mr Peggotty suddenly burst into a roar of laughter, and rubbed his hands up and down his legs, as he had been accustomed to do when he enjoyed himself in the long-shipwrecked boat.

'Would you believe it!' he said. 'Why, someun even made offer fur to marry her! If a ship's cook that was turning settler, Mas'r Davy, didn't make offers fur to marry Missis Gummidge, I'm Gormed - and I can't say no fairer than that!'

I never saw Agnes laugh so. This sudden ecstasy on the part of Mr Peggotty was so delightful to her, that she could not leave off laughing; and the more she laughed the more she made me laugh, and the greater Mr Peggotty's ecstasy became, and the more he rubbed his legs.

'And what did Mrs Gummidge say?' I asked, when I was grave enough.

'If you'll believe me,' returned Mr Peggotty, 'Missis Gummidge, 'stead of saying 'thank you, I'm much obleeged to you, I ain't a-going fur to

change my condition at my time of life,' up'd with a bucket as was standing by, and laid it over that their ship's cook's head 'till he sung out fur help, and I went in and reskied of him.'

Mr Peggotty burst into a great roar of laughter, and Agnes and I both kept him company.

'But I must say this, for the good creetur,' he resumed, wiping his face, when we were quite exhausted; 'she has been all she said she'd be to us, and more. She's the willingest, the trewest, the honestest-helping woman, Mas'r Davy, as ever draw'd the breath of life. I have never know'd her to be lone and lorn, for a single minute, not even when the colony was all afore us, and we was new to it. And thinking of the old 'un is a thing she never done, I do assure you, since she left England!'

'Now, last, not least, Mr Micawber,' said I. 'He has paid off every obligation he incurred here - even to Traddles's bill, you remember my dear Agnes - and therefore we may take it for granted that he is doing well. But what is the latest news of him?'

Mr Peggotty, with a smile, put his hand in his breast-pocket, and produced a flat-folded, paper parcel, from which he took out, with much care, a little odd-looking newspaper.

'You are to understan', Mas'r Davy,' said he, 'as we have left the Bush now, being so well to do; and have gone right away round to Port Middlebay Harbour, wheer their's what we call a town.'

'Mr Micawber was in the Bush near you?' said I.

'Bless you, yes,' said Mr Peggotty, 'and turned to with a will. I never wish to meet a better gen'l'man for turning to with a will. I've seen that their bald head of his a perspiring in the sun, Mas'r Davy, till I a'most thowt it would have melted away. And now he's a Magistrate.'

'A Magistrate, eh?' said I.

Mr Peggotty pointed to a certain paragraph in the newspaper, where I read aloud as follows, from the Port Middlebay Times:

'The public dinner to our distinguished fellow-colonist and townsman, WILKINS MICAWBER, ESQUIRE, Port Middlebay District Magistrate, came off yesterday in the large room of the Hotel, which was crowded to suffocation. It is estimated that not fewer than forty-seven persons must have been accommodated with dinner at one time, exclusive of the company in the passage and on the stairs. The beauty, fashion, and exclusiveness of Port Middlebay, flocked to do honour to one so

deservedly esteemed, so highly talented, and so widely popular. Doctor Mell (of Colonial Salem-House Grammar School, Port Middlebay) presided, and on his right sat the distinguished guest. After the removal of the cloth, and the singing of Non Nobis (beautifully executed, and in which we were at no loss to distinguish the bell-like notes of that gifted amateur, WILKINS MICAWBER, ESQUIRE, JUNIOR), the usual loyal and patriotic toasts were severally given and rapturously received. Doctor Mell, in a speech replete with feeling, then proposed 'Our distinguished Guest, the ornament of our town. May he never leave us but to better himself, and may his success among us be such as to render his bettering himself impossible!' The cheering with which the toast was received defies description. Again and again it rose and fell, like the waves of ocean. At length all was hushed, and WILKINS MICAWBER, ESQUIRE, presented himself to return thanks. Far be it from us, in the present comparatively imperfect state of the resources of our establishment, to endeavour to follow our distinguished townsman through the smoothly-flowing periods of his polished and highly-ornate address! Suffice it to observe, that it was a masterpiece of eloquence; and that those passages in which he more particularly traced his own successful career to its source, and warned the younger portion of his auditory from the shoals of ever incurring pecuniary liabilities which they were unable to liquidate, brought a tear into the manliest eye present. The remaining toasts were DOCTOR MELL; Mrs MICAWBER (who gracefully bowed her acknowledgements from the side-door, where a galaxy of beauty was elevated on chairs, at once to witness and adorn the gratifying scene), Mrs RIDGER BEGS (late Miss Micawber); Mrs MELL; WILKINS MICAWBER, ESQUIRE, JUNIOR (who convulsed the assembly by humorously remarking that he found himself unable to return thanks in a speech, but would do so, with their permission, in a song); Mrs MICAWBER'S FAMILY (well known, it is needless to remark, in the mother-country), &c. &c. &c. At the conclusion of the proceedings the tables were cleared as if by art-magic for dancing. Among the votaries of TERPSICHORE, who disported themselves until Sol gave warning for departure, Wilkins Micawber, Esquire, Junior, and the lovely and accomplished Miss Helena, fourth daughter of Doctor Mell, were particularly remarkable.'

I was looking back to the name of Doctor Mell, pleased to have discovered, in these happier circumstances, Mr Mell, formerly poor pinched usher to my Middlesex magistrate, when Mr Peggotty pointing to another part of the paper, my eyes rested on my own name, and I read thus:

' TO DAVID COPPERFIELD, ESQUIRE,

'THE EMINENT AUTHOR.

'My Dear Sir,

'Years have elapsed, since I had an opportunity of ocularly perusing the lineaments, now familiar to the imaginations of a considerable portion of the civilized world.

'But, my dear Sir, though estranged (by the force of circumstances over which I have had no control) from the personal society of the friend and companion of my youth, I have not been unmindful of his soaring flight. Nor have I been debarred,

Though seas between us braid ha' roared,

(BURNS) from participating in the intellectual feasts he has spread before us.

'I cannot, therefore, allow of the departure from this place of an individual whom we mutually respect and esteem, without, my dear Sir, taking this public opportunity of thanking you, on my own behalf, and, I may undertake to add, on that of the whole of the Inhabitants of Port Middlebay, for the gratification of which you are the ministering agent.

'Go on, my dear Sir! You are not unknown here, you are not unappreciated. Though 'remote', we are neither 'unfriended', 'melancholy', nor (I may add) 'slow'. Go on, my dear Sir, in your Eagle course! The inhabitants of Port Middlebay may at least aspire to watch it, with delight, with entertainment, with instruction!

'Among the eyes elevated towards you from this portion of the globe, will ever be found, while it has light and life,

'The 'Eye 'Appertaining to

'WILKINS MICAWBER, 'Magistrate.'

I found, on glancing at the remaining contents of the newspaper, that Mr Micawber was a diligent and esteemed correspondent of that journal. There was another letter from him in the same paper, touching a bridge; there was an advertisement of a collection of similar letters by him, to be shortly republished, in a neat volume, 'with considerable additions'; and, unless I am very much mistaken, the Leading Article was his also.

We talked much of Mr Micawber, on many other evenings while Mr Peggotty remained with us. He lived with us during the whole term of his stay, - which, I think, was something less than a month, - and his sister and my aunt came to London to see him. Agnes and I parted

from him aboard-ship, when he sailed; and we shall never part from him more, on earth.

But before he left, he went with me to Yarmouth, to see a little tablet I had put up in the churchyard to the memory of Ham. While I was copying the plain inscription for him at his request, I saw him stoop, and gather a tuft of grass from the grave and a little earth.

'For Em'ly,' he said, as he put it in his breast. 'I promised, Mas'r Davy.'