

Chapter VIII - Paul's Further Progress, Growth and Character

Beneath the watching and attentive eyes of Time - so far another Major - Paul's slumbers gradually changed. More and more light broke in upon them; distincter and distincter dreams disturbed them; an accumulating crowd of objects and impressions swarmed about his rest; and so he passed from babyhood to childhood, and became a talking, walking, wondering Dombey.

On the downfall and banishment of Richards, the nursery may be said to have been put into commission: as a Public Department is sometimes, when no individual Atlas can be found to support it The Commissioners were, of course, Mrs Chick and Miss Tox: who devoted themselves to their duties with such astonishing ardour that Major Bagstock had every day some new reminder of his being forsaken, while Mr Chick, bereft of domestic supervision, cast himself upon the gay world, dined at clubs and coffee-houses, smelt of smoke on three different occasions, went to the play by himself, and in short, loosened (as Mrs Chick once told him) every social bond, and moral obligation.

Yet, in spite of his early promise, all this vigilance and care could not make little Paul a thriving boy. Naturally delicate, perhaps, he pined and wasted after the dismissal of his nurse, and, for a long time, seemed but to wait his opportunity of gliding through their hands, and seeking his lost mother. This dangerous ground in his steeple-chase towards manhood passed, he still found it very rough riding, and was grievously beset by all the obstacles in his course. Every tooth was a break-neck fence, and every pimple in the measles a stone wall to him. He was down in every fit of the hooping-cough, and rolled upon and crushed by a whole field of small diseases, that came trooping on each other's heels to prevent his getting up again. Some bird of prey got into his throat instead of the thrush; and the very chickens turning ferocious - if they have anything to do with that infant malady to which they lend their name - worried him like tiger-cats.

The chill of Paul's christening had struck home, perhaps to some sensitive part of his nature, which could not recover itself in the cold shade of his father; but he was an unfortunate child from that day. Mrs Wickam often said she never see a dear so put upon.

Mrs Wickam was a waiter's wife - which would seem equivalent to being any other man's widow - whose application for an engagement in Mr Dombey's service had been favourably considered, on account of the apparent impossibility of her having any followers, or anyone to follow; and who, from within a day or two of Paul's sharp weaning, had been engaged as his nurse. Mrs Wickam was a meek woman, of a fair complexion, with her eyebrows always elevated, and her head

always drooping; who was always ready to pity herself, or to be pitied, or to pity anybody else; and who had a surprising natural gift of viewing all subjects in an utterly forlorn and pitiable light, and bringing dreadful precedents to bear upon them, and deriving the greatest consolation from the exercise of that talent.

It is hardly necessary to observe, that no touch of this quality ever reached the magnificent knowledge of Mr Dombey. It would have been remarkable, indeed, if any had; when no one in the house - not even Mrs Chick or Miss Tox - dared ever whisper to him that there had, on any one occasion, been the least reason for uneasiness in reference to little Paul. He had settled, within himself, that the child must necessarily pass through a certain routine of minor maladies, and that the sooner he did so the better. If he could have bought him off, or provided a substitute, as in the case of an unlucky drawing for the militia, he would have been glad to do so, on liberal terms. But as this was not feasible, he merely wondered, in his haughty-manner, now and then, what Nature meant by it; and comforted himself with the reflection that there was another milestone passed upon the road, and that the great end of the journey lay so much the nearer. For the feeling uppermost in his mind, now and constantly intensifying, and increasing in it as Paul grew older, was impatience. Impatience for the time to come, when his visions of their united consequence and grandeur would be triumphantly realized.

Some philosophers tell us that selfishness is at the root of our best loves and affections.' Mr Dombey's young child was, from the beginning, so distinctly important to him as a part of his own greatness, or (which is the same thing) of the greatness of Dombey and Son, that there is no doubt his parental affection might have been easily traced, like many a goodly superstructure of fair fame, to a very low foundation. But he loved his son with all the love he had. If there were a warm place in his frosty heart, his son occupied it; if its very hard surface could receive the impression of any image, the image of that son was there; though not so much as an infant, or as a boy, but as a grown man - the 'Son' of the Firm. Therefore he was impatient to advance into the future, and to hurry over the intervening passages of his history. Therefore he had little or no anxiety' about them, in spite of his love; feeling as if the boy had a charmed life, and must become the man with whom he held such constant communication in his thoughts, and for whom he planned and projected, as for an existing reality, every day.

Thus Paul grew to be nearly five years old. He was a pretty little fellow; though there was something wan and wistful in his small face, that gave occasion to many significant shakes of Mrs Wickam's head, and many long-drawn inspirations of Mrs Wickam's breath. His temper gave abundant promise of being imperious in after-life; and he had as

hopeful an apprehension of his own importance, and the rightful subservience of all other things and persons to it, as heart could desire. He was childish and sportive enough at times, and not of a sullen disposition; but he had a strange, old-fashioned, thoughtful way, at other times, of sitting brooding in his miniature arm-chair, when he looked (and talked) like one of those terrible little Beings in the Fairy tales, who, at a hundred and fifty or two hundred years of age, fantastically represent the children for whom they have been substituted. He would frequently be stricken with this precocious mood upstairs in the nursery; and would sometimes lapse into it suddenly, exclaiming that he was tired: even while playing with Florence, or driving Miss Tox in single harness. But at no time did he fall into it so surely, as when, his little chair being carried down into his father's room, he sat there with him after dinner, by the fire. They were the strangest pair at such a time that ever firelight shone upon. Mr Dombey so erect and solemn, gazing at the blare; his little image, with an old, old face, peering into the red perspective with the fixed and rapt attention of a sage. Mr Dombey entertaining complicated worldly schemes and plans; the little image entertaining Heaven knows what wild fancies, half-formed thoughts, and wandering speculations. Mr Dombey stiff with starch and arrogance; the little image by inheritance, and in unconscious imitation. The two so very much alike, and yet so monstrously contrasted.

On one of these occasions, when they had both been perfectly quiet for a long time, and Mr Dombey only knew that the child was awake by occasionally glancing at his eye, where the bright fire was sparkling like a jewel, little Paul broke silence thus:

'Papa! what's money?'

The abrupt question had such immediate reference to the subject of Mr Dombey's thoughts, that Mr Dombey was quite disconcerted.

'What is money, Paul?' he answered. 'Money?'

'Yes,' said the child, laying his hands upon the elbows of his little chair, and turning the old face up towards Mr Dombey's; 'what is money?'

Mr Dombey was in a difficulty. He would have liked to give him some explanation involving the terms circulating-medium, currency, depreciation of currency', paper, bullion, rates of exchange, value of precious metals in the market, and so forth; but looking down at the little chair, and seeing what a long way down it was, he answered: 'Gold, and silver, and copper. Guineas, shillings, half-pence. You know what they are?'

'Oh yes, I know what they are,' said Paul. 'I don't mean that, Papa. I mean what's money after all?'

Heaven and Earth, how old his face was as he turned it up again towards his father's!

'What is money after all!' said Mr Dombey, backing his chair a little, that he might the better gaze in sheer amazement at the presumptuous atom that propounded such an inquiry.

'I mean, Papa, what can it do?' returned Paul, folding his arms (they were hardly long enough to fold), and looking at the fire, and up at him, and at the fire, and up at him again.

Mr Dombey drew his chair back to its former place, and patted him on the head. 'You'll know better by-and-by, my man,' he said. 'Money, Paul, can do anything.' He took hold of the little hand, and beat it softly against one of his own, as he said so.

But Paul got his hand free as soon as he could; and rubbing it gently to and fro on the elbow of his chair, as if his wit were in the palm, and he were sharpening it - and looking at the fire again, as though the fire had been his adviser and prompter - repeated, after a short pause:

'Anything, Papa?'

'Yes. Anything - almost,' said Mr Dombey.

'Anything means everything, don't it, Papa?' asked his son: not observing, or possibly not understanding, the qualification.

'It includes it: yes,' said Mr Dombey.

'Why didn't money save me my Mama?' returned the child. 'It isn't cruel, is it?'

'Cruel!' said Mr Dombey, settling his neckcloth, and seeming to resent the idea. 'No. A good thing can't be cruel.'

'If it's a good thing, and can do anything,' said the little fellow, thoughtfully, as he looked back at the fire, 'I wonder why it didn't save me my Mama.'

He didn't ask the question of his father this time. Perhaps he had seen, with a child's quickness, that it had already made his father uncomfortable. But he repeated the thought aloud, as if it were quite an old one to him, and had troubled him very much; and sat with his

chin resting on his hand, still cogitating and looking for an explanation in the fire.

Mr Dombey having recovered from his surprise, not to say his alarm (for it was the very first occasion on which the child had ever broached the subject of his mother to him, though he had had him sitting by his side, in this same manner, evening after evening), expounded to him how that money, though a very potent spirit, never to be disparaged on any account whatever, could not keep people alive whose time was come to die; and how that we must all die, unfortunately, even in the City, though we were never so rich. But how that money caused us to be honoured, feared, respected, courted, and admired, and made us powerful and glorious in the eyes of all men; and how that it could, very often, even keep off death, for a long time together. How, for example, it had secured to his Mama the services of Mr Pilkins, by which be, Paul, had often profited himself; likewise of the great Doctor Parker Peps, whom he had never known. And how it could do all, that could be done. This, with more to the same purpose, Mr Dombey instilled into the mind of his son, who listened attentively, and seemed to understand the greater part of what was said to him.

'It can't make me strong and quite well, either, Papa; can it?' asked Paul, after a short silence; rubbing his tiny hands.

'Why, you are strong and quite well,' returned Mr Dombey. 'Are you not?'

Oh! the age of the face that was turned up again, with an expression, half of melancholy, half of slyness, on it!

'You are as strong and well as such little people usually are? Eh?' said Mr Dombey.

'Florence is older than I am, but I'm not as strong and well as Florence, 'I know,' returned the child; 'and I believe that when Florence was as little as me, she could play a great deal longer at a time without tiring herself. I am so tired sometimes,' said little Paul, warming his hands, and looking in between the bars of the grate, as if some ghostly puppet-show were performing there, 'and my bones ache so (Wickam says it's my bones), that I don't know what to do.'

'Ay! But that's at night,' said Mr Dombey, drawing his own chair closer to his son's, and laying his hand gently on his back; 'little people should be tired at night, for then they sleep well.'

'Oh, it's not at night, Papa,' returned the child, 'it's in the day; and I lie down in Florence's lap, and she sings to me. At night I dream about such cu-ri-ous things!'

And he went on, warming his hands again, and thinking about them, like an old man or a young goblin.

Mr Dombey was so astonished, and so uncomfortable, and so perfectly at a loss how to pursue the conversation, that he could only sit looking at his son by the light of the fire, with his hand resting on his back, as if it were detained there by some magnetic attraction. Once he advanced his other hand, and turned the contemplative face towards his own for a moment. But it sought the fire again as soon as he released it; and remained, addressed towards the flickering blaze, until the nurse appeared, to summon him to bed.

'I want Florence to come for me,' said Paul.

'Won't you come with your poor Nurse Wickam, Master Paul?' inquired that attendant, with great pathos.

'No, I won't,' replied Paul, composing himself in his arm-chair again, like the master of the house.

Invoking a blessing upon his innocence, Mrs Wickam withdrew, and presently Florence appeared in her stead. The child immediately started up with sudden readiness and animation, and raised towards his father in bidding him good-night, a countenance so much brighter, so much younger, and so much more child-like altogether, that Mr Dombey, while he felt greatly reassured by the change, was quite amazed at it.

After they had left the room together, he thought he heard a soft voice singing; and remembering that Paul had said his sister sung to him, he had the curiosity to open the door and listen, and look after them. She was toiling up the great, wide, vacant staircase, with him in her arms; his head was lying on her shoulder, one of his arms thrown negligently round her neck. So they went, toiling up; she singing all the way, and Paul sometimes crooning out a feeble accompaniment. Mr Dombey looked after them until they reached the top of the staircase - not without halting to rest by the way - and passed out of his sight; and then he still stood gazing upwards, until the dull rays of the moon, glimmering in a melancholy manner through the dim skylight, sent him back to his room.

Mrs Chick and Miss Tox were convoked in council at dinner next day; and when the cloth was removed, Mr Dombey opened the proceedings by requiring to be informed, without any gloss or reservation, whether there was anything the matter with Paul, and what Mr Pilkins said about him.

'For the child is hardly,' said Mr Dombey, 'as stout as I could wish.'

'My dear Paul,' returned Mrs Chick, 'with your usual happy discrimination, which I am weak enough to envy you, every time I am in your company; and so I think is Miss Tox

'Oh my dear!' said Miss Tox, softly, 'how could it be otherwise? Presumptuous as it is to aspire to such a level; still, if the bird of night may - but I'll not trouble Mr Dombey with the sentiment. It merely relates to the Bulbul.'

Mr Dombey bent his head in stately recognition of the Bulbuls as an old-established body.

'With your usual happy discrimination, my dear Paul,' resumed Mrs Chick, 'you have hit the point at once. Our darling is altogether as stout as we could wish. The fact is, that his mind is too much for him. His soul is a great deal too large for his frame. I am sure the way in which that dear child talks!' said Mrs Chick, shaking her head; 'no one would believe. His expressions, Lucretia, only yesterday upon the subject of Funerals!

'I am afraid,' said Mr Dombey, interrupting her testily, 'that some of those persons upstairs suggest improper subjects to the child. He was speaking to me last night about his - about his Bones,' said Mr Dombey, laying an irritated stress upon the word. 'What on earth has anybody to do with the - with the - Bones of my son? He is not a living skeleton, I suppose.

'Very far from it,' said Mrs Chick, with unspeakable expression.

'I hope so,' returned her brother. 'Funerals again! who talks to the child of funerals? We are not undertakers, or mutes, or grave-diggers, I believe.'

'Very far from it,' interposed Mrs Chick, with the same profound expression as before.

'Then who puts such things into his head?' said Mr Dombey. 'Really I was quite dismayed and shocked last night. Who puts such things into his head, Louisa?'

'My dear Paul,' said Mrs Chick, after a moment's silence, 'it is of no use inquiring. I do not think, I will tell you candidly that Wickam is a person of very cheerful spirit, or what one would call a - '

'A daughter of Momus,' Miss Tox softly suggested.

'Exactly so,' said Mrs Chick; 'but she is exceedingly attentive and useful, and not at all presumptuous; indeed I never saw a more

biddable woman. I would say that for her, if I was put upon my trial before a Court of Justice.'

'Well! you are not put upon your trial before a Court of Justice, at present, Louisa,' returned Mr Dombey, chafing,' and therefore it don't matter.

'My dear Paul,' said Mrs Chick, in a warning voice, 'I must be spoken to kindly, or there is an end of me,' at the same time a premonitory redness developed itself in Mrs Chick's eyelids which was an invariable sign of rain, unless the weather changed directly.

'I was inquiring, Louisa,' observed Mr Dombey, in an altered voice, and after a decent interval, 'about Paul's health and actual state.

'If the dear child,' said Mrs Chick, in the tone of one who was summing up what had been previously quite agreed upon, instead of saying it all for the first time, 'is a little weakened by that last attack, and is not in quite such vigorous health as we could wish; and if he has some temporary weakness in his system, and does occasionally seem about to lose, for the moment, the use of his - '

Mrs Chick was afraid to say limbs, after Mr Dombey's recent objection to bones, and therefore waited for a suggestion from Miss Tox, who, true to her office, hazarded 'members.'

'Members!' repeated Mr Dombey.

'I think the medical gentleman mentioned legs this morning, my dear Louisa, did he not?' said Miss Tox.

'Why, of course he did, my love,' retorted Mrs Chick, mildly reproachful. 'How can you ask me? You heard him. I say, if our dear Paul should lose, for the moment, the use of his legs, these are casualties common to many children at his time of life, and not to be prevented by any care or caution. The sooner you understand that, Paul, and admit that, the better. If you have any doubt as to the amount of care, and caution, and affection, and self-sacrifice, that has been bestowed upon little Paul, I should wish to refer the question to your medical attendant, or to any of your dependants in this house. Call Towlinson,' said Mrs Chick, 'I believe he has no prejudice in our favour; quite the contrary. I should wish to hear what accusation Towlinson can make!'

'Surely you must know, Louisa,' observed Mr Dombey, 'that I don't question your natural devotion to, and regard for, the future head of my house.'

'I am glad to hear it, Paul,' said Mrs Chick; 'but really you are very odd, and sometimes talk very strangely, though without meaning it, I know. If your dear boy's soul is too much for his body, Paul, you should remember whose fault that is - who he takes after, I mean - and make the best of it. He's as like his Papa as he can be. People have noticed it in the streets. The very beadle, I am informed, observed it, so long ago as at his christening. He's a very respectable man, with children of his own. He ought to know.'

'Mr Pilkins saw Paul this morning, I believe?' said Mr Dombey.

'Yes, he did,' returned his sister. 'Miss Tox and myself were present. Miss Tox and myself are always present. We make a point of it. Mr Pilkins has seen him for some days past, and a very clever man I believe him to be. He says it is nothing to speak of; which I can confirm, if that is any consolation; but he recommended, to-day, sea-air. Very wisely, Paul, I feel convinced.'

'Sea-air,' repeated Mr Dombey, looking at his sister.

'There is nothing to be made uneasy by, in that,' said Mrs Chick. 'My George and Frederick were both ordered sea-air, when they were about his age; and I have been ordered it myself a great many times. I quite agree with you, Paul, that perhaps topics may be incautiously mentioned upstairs before him, which it would be as well for his little mind not to expatiate upon; but I really don't see how that is to be helped, in the case of a child of his quickness. If he were a common child, there would be nothing in it. I must say I think, with Miss Tox, that a short absence from this house, the air of Brighton, and the bodily and mental training of so judicious a person as Mrs Pipchin for instance - '

'Who is Mrs Pipchin, Louisa?' asked Mr Dombey; aghast at this familiar introduction of a name he had never heard before.

'Mrs Pipchin, my dear Paul,' returned his sister, 'is an elderly lady - Miss Tox knows her whole history - who has for some time devoted all the energies of her mind, with the greatest success, to the study and treatment of infancy, and who has been extremely well connected. Her husband broke his heart in - how did you say her husband broke his heart, my dear? I forget the precise circumstances.'

'In pumping water out of the Peruvian Mines,' replied Miss Tox.

'Not being a Pumper himself, of course,' said Mrs Chick, glancing at her brother; and it really did seem necessary to offer the explanation, for Miss Tox had spoken of him as if he had died at the handle; 'but having invested money in the speculation, which failed. I believe that

Mrs Pipchin's management of children is quite astonishing. I have heard it commended in private circles ever since I was - dear me - how high!' Mrs Chick's eye wandered about the bookcase near the bust of Mr Pitt, which was about ten feet from the ground.

'Perhaps I should say of Mrs Pipchin, my dear Sir,' observed Miss Tox, with an ingenuous blush, 'having been so pointedly referred to, that the encomium which has been passed upon her by your sweet sister is well merited. Many ladies and gentleman, now grown up to be interesting members of society, have been indebted to her care. The humble individual who addresses you was once under her charge. I believe juvenile nobility itself is no stranger to her establishment.'

'Do I understand that this respectable matron keeps an establishment, Miss Tox?' the Mr Dombey, condescendingly.

'Why, I really don't know,' rejoined that lady, 'whether I am justified in calling it so. It is not a Preparatory School by any means. Should I express my meaning,' said Miss Tox, with peculiar sweetness, 'if I designated it an infantine Boarding-House of a very select description?'

'On an exceedingly limited and particular scale,' suggested Mrs Chick, with a glance at her brother.

'Oh! Exclusion itself!' said Miss Tox.

There was something in this. Mrs Pipchin's husband having broken his heart of the Peruvian mines was good. It had a rich sound. Besides, Mr Dombey was in a state almost amounting to consternation at the idea of Paul remaining where he was one hour after his removal had been recommended by the medical practitioner. It was a stoppage and delay upon the road the child must traverse, slowly at the best, before the goal was reached. Their recommendation of Mrs Pipchin had great weight with him; for he knew that they were jealous of any interference with their charge, and he never for a moment took it into account that they might be solicitous to divide a responsibility, of which he had, as shown just now, his own established views. Broke his heart of the Peruvian mines, mused Mr Dombey. Well! a very respectable way of doing It.

'Supposing we should decide, on to-morrow's inquiries, to send Paul down to Brighton to this lady, who would go with him?' inquired Mr Dombey, after some reflection.

'I don't think you could send the child anywhere at present without Florence, my dear Paul,' returned his sister, hesitating. 'It's quite an infatuation with him. He's very young, you know, and has his fancies.'

Mr Dombey turned his head away, and going slowly to the bookcase, and unlocking it, brought back a book to read.

'Anybody else, Louisa?' he said, without looking up, and turning over the leaves.

'Wickam, of course. Wickam would be quite sufficient, I should say,' returned his sister. 'Paul being in such hands as Mrs Pipchin's, you could hardly send anybody who would be a further check upon her. You would go down yourself once a week at least, of course.'

'Of course,' said Mr Dombey; and sat looking at one page for an hour afterwards, without reading one word.

This celebrated Mrs Pipchin was a marvellous ill-favoured, ill-conditioned old lady, of a stooping figure, with a mottled face, like bad marble, a hook nose, and a hard grey eye, that looked as if it might have been hammered at on an anvil without sustaining any injury. Forty years at least had elapsed since the Peruvian mines had been the death of Mr Pipchin; but his relict still wore black bombazeen, of such a lustreless, deep, dead, sombre shade, that gas itself couldn't light her up after dark, and her presence was a quencher to any number of candles. She was generally spoken of as 'a great manager' of children; and the secret of her management was, to give them everything that they didn't like, and nothing that they did - which was found to sweeten their dispositions very much. She was such a bitter old lady, that one was tempted to believe there had been some mistake in the application of the Peruvian machinery, and that all her waters of gladness and milk of human kindness, had been pumped out dry, instead of the mines.

The Castle of this ogress and child-queller was in a steep by-street at Brighton; where the soil was more than usually chalky, flinty, and sterile, and the houses were more than usually brittle and thin; where the small front-gardens had the unaccountable property of producing nothing but marigolds, whatever was sown in them; and where snails were constantly discovered holding on to the street doors, and other public places they were not expected to ornament, with the tenacity of cupping-glasses. In the winter time the air couldn't be got out of the Castle, and in the summer time it couldn't be got in. There was such a continual reverberation of wind in it, that it sounded like a great shell, which the inhabitants were obliged to hold to their ears night and day, whether they liked it or no. It was not, naturally, a fresh-smelling house; and in the window of the front parlour, which was never opened, Mrs Pipchin kept a collection of plants in pots, which imparted an earthy flavour of their own to the establishment. However choice examples of their kind, too, these plants were of a kind peculiarly adapted to the embowerment of Mrs Pipchin. There were

half-a-dozen specimens of the cactus, writhing round bits of lath, like hairy serpents; another specimen shooting out broad claws, like a green lobster; several creeping vegetables, possessed of sticky and adhesive leaves; and one uncomfortable flower-pot hanging to the ceiling, which appeared to have boiled over, and tickling people underneath with its long green ends, reminded them of spiders - in which Mrs Pipchin's dwelling was uncommonly prolific, though perhaps it challenged competition still more proudly, in the season, in point of earwigs.

Mrs Pipchin's scale of charges being high, however, to all who could afford to pay, and Mrs Pipchin very seldom sweetening the equable acidity of her nature in favour of anybody, she was held to be an old 'lady of remarkable firmness, who was quite scientific in her knowledge of the childish character.' On this reputation, and on the broken heart of Mr Pipchin, she had contrived, taking one year with another, to eke out a tolerable sufficient living since her husband's demise. Within three days after Mrs Chick's first allusion to her, this excellent old lady had the satisfaction of anticipating a handsome addition to her current receipts, from the pocket of Mr Dombey; and of receiving Florence and her little brother Paul, as inmates of the Castle.

Mrs Chick and Miss Tox, who had brought them down on the previous night (which they all passed at an Hotel), had just driven away from the door, on their journey home again; and Mrs Pipchin, with her back to the fire, stood, reviewing the new-comers, like an old soldier. Mrs Pipchin's middle-aged niece, her good-natured and devoted slave, but possessing a gaunt and iron-bound aspect, and much afflicted with boils on her nose, was divesting Master Bitherstone of the clean collar he had worn on parade. Miss Pankey, the only other little boarder at present, had that moment been walked off to the Castle Dungeon (an empty apartment at the back, devoted to correctional purposes), for having sniffed thrice, in the presence of visitors.

'Well, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin to Paul, 'how do you think you shall like me?'

'I don't think I shall like you at all,' replied Paul. 'I want to go away. This isn't my house.'

'No. It's mine,' retorted Mrs Pipchin.

'It's a very nasty one,' said Paul.

'There's a worse place in it than this though,' said Mrs Pipchin, 'where we shut up our bad boys.'

'Has he ever been in it?' asked Paul: pointing out Master Bitherstone.

Mrs Pipchin nodded assent; and Paul had enough to do, for the rest of that day, in surveying Master Bitherstone from head to foot, and watching all the workings of his countenance, with the interest attaching to a boy of mysterious and terrible experiences.

At one o'clock there was a dinner, chiefly of the farinaceous and vegetable kind, when Miss Pankey (a mild little blue-eyed morsel of a child, who was shampoo'd every morning, and seemed in danger of being rubbed away, altogether) was led in from captivity by the ogress herself, and instructed that nobody who sniffed before visitors ever went to Heaven. When this great truth had been thoroughly impressed upon her, she was regaled with rice; and subsequently repeated the form of grace established in the Castle, in which there was a special clause, thanking Mrs Pipchin for a good dinner. Mrs Pipchin's niece, Berinthia, took cold pork. Mrs Pipchin, whose constitution required warm nourishment, made a special repast of mutton-chops, which were brought in hot and hot, between two plates, and smelt very nice.

As it rained after dinner, and they couldn't go out walking on the beach, and Mrs Pipchin's constitution required rest after chops, they went away with Berry (otherwise Berinthia) to the Dungeon; an empty room looking out upon a chalk wall and a water-butt, and made ghastly by a ragged fireplace without any stove in it. Enlivened by company, however, this was the best place after all; for Berry played with them there, and seemed to enjoy a game at romps as much as they did; until Mrs Pipchin knocking angrily at the wall, like the Cock Lane Ghost' revived, they left off, and Berry told them stories in a whisper until twilight.

For tea there was plenty of milk and water, and bread and butter, with a little black tea-pot for Mrs Pipchin and Berry, and buttered toast unlimited for Mrs Pipchin, which was brought in, hot and hot, like the chops. Though Mrs Pipchin got very greasy, outside, over this dish, it didn't seem to lubricate her internally, at all; for she was as fierce as ever, and the hard grey eye knew no softening.

After tea, Berry brought out a little work-box, with the Royal Pavilion on the lid, and fell to working busily; while Mrs Pipchin, having put on her spectacles and opened a great volume bound in green baize, began to nod. And whenever Mrs Pipchin caught herself falling forward into the fire, and woke up, she filliped Master Bitherstone on the nose for nodding too.

At last it was the children's bedtime, and after prayers they went to bed. As little Miss Pankey was afraid of sleeping alone in the dark, Mrs Pipchin always made a point of driving her upstairs herself, like a sheep; and it was cheerful to hear Miss Pankey moaning long afterwards, in the least eligible chamber, and Mrs Pipchin now and

then going in to shake her. At about half-past nine o'clock the odour of a warm sweet-bread (Mrs Pipchin's constitution wouldn't go to sleep without sweet-bread) diversified the prevailing fragrance of the house, which Mrs Wickam said was 'a smell of building;' and slumber fell upon the Castle shortly after.

The breakfast next morning was like the tea over night, except that Mrs Pipchin took her roll instead of toast, and seemed a little more irate when it was over. Master Bitherstone read aloud to the rest a pedigree from Genesis judiciously selected by Mrs Pipchin), getting over the names with the ease and clearness of a person tumbling up the treadmill. That done, Miss Pankey was borne away to be shampoo'd; and Master Bitherstone to have something else done to him with salt water, from which he always returned very blue and dejected. Paul and Florence went out in the meantime on the beach with Wickam - who was constantly in tears - and at about noon Mrs Pipchin presided over some Early Readings. It being a part of Mrs Pipchin's system not to encourage a child's mind to develop and expand itself like a young flower, but to open it by force like an oyster, the moral of these lessons was usually of a violent and stunning character: the hero - a naughty boy - seldom, in the mildest catastrophe, being finished off anything less than a lion, or a bear.

Such was life at Mrs Pipchin's. On Saturday Mr Dombey came down; and Florence and Paul would go to his Hotel, and have tea. They passed the whole of Sunday with him, and generally rode out before dinner; and on these occasions Mr Dombey seemed to grow, like Falstaff's assailants, and instead of being one man in buckram, to become a dozen. Sunday evening was the most melancholy evening in the week; for Mrs Pipchin always made a point of being particularly cross on Sunday nights. Miss Pankey was generally brought back from an aunt's at Rottingdean, in deep distress; and Master Bitherstone, whose relatives were all in India, and who was required to sit, between the services, in an erect position with his head against the parlour wall, neither moving hand nor foot, suffered so acutely in his young spirits that he once asked Florence, on a Sunday night, if she could give him any idea of the way back to Bengal.

But it was generally said that Mrs Pipchin was a woman of system with children; and no doubt she was. Certainly the wild ones went home tame enough, after sojourning for a few months beneath her hospitable roof. It was generally said, too, that it was highly creditable of Mrs Pipchin to have devoted herself to this way of life, and to have made such a sacrifice of her feelings, and such a resolute stand against her troubles, when Mr Pipchin broke his heart in the Peruvian mines.

At this exemplary old lady, Paul would sit staring in his little arm-chair by the fire, for any length of time. He never seemed to know what weariness was, when he was looking fixedly at Mrs Pipchin. He was not fond of her; he was not afraid of her; but in those old, old moods of his, she seemed to have a grotesque attraction for him. There he would sit, looking at her, and warming his hands, and looking at her, until he sometimes quite confounded Mrs Pipchin, Ogress as she was. Once she asked him, when they were alone, what he was thinking about.

'You,' said Paul, without the least reserve.

'And what are you thinking about me?' asked Mrs Pipchin.

'I'm thinking how old you must be,' said Paul.

'You mustn't say such things as that, young gentleman,' returned the dame. 'That'll never do.'

'Why not?' asked Paul.

'Because it's not polite,' said Mrs Pipchin, snappishly.

'Not polite?' said Paul.

'No.'

'It's not polite,' said Paul, innocently, 'to eat all the mutton chops and toast, Wickam says.'

'Wickam,' retorted Mrs Pipchin, colouring, 'is a wicked, impudent, bold-faced hussy.'

'What's that?' inquired Paul.

'Never you mind, Sir,' retorted Mrs Pipchin. 'Remember the story of the little boy that was gored to death by a mad bull for asking questions.'

'If the bull was mad,' said Paul, 'how did he know that the boy had asked questions? Nobody can go and whisper secrets to a mad bull. I don't believe that story.'

'You don't believe it, Sir?' repeated Mrs Pipchin, amazed.

'No,' said Paul.

'Not if it should happen to have been a tame bull, you little Infidel?' said Mrs Pipchin.

As Paul had not considered the subject in that light, and had founded his conclusions on the alleged lunacy of the bull, he allowed himself to be put down for the present. But he sat turning it over in his mind, with such an obvious intention of fixing Mrs Pipchin presently, that even that hardy old lady deemed it prudent to retreat until he should have forgotten the subject.

From that time, Mrs Pipchin appeared to have something of the same odd kind of attraction towards Paul, as Paul had towards her. She would make him move his chair to her side of the fire, instead of sitting opposite; and there he would remain in a nook between Mrs Pipchin and the fender, with all the light of his little face absorbed into the black bombazeen drapery, studying every line and wrinkle of her countenance, and peering at the hard grey eye, until Mrs Pipchin was sometimes fain to shut it, on pretence of dozing. Mrs Pipchin had an old black cat, who generally lay coiled upon the centre foot of the fender, purring egotistically, and winking at the fire until the contracted pupils of his eyes were like two notes of admiration. The good old lady might have been - not to record it disrespectfully - a witch, and Paul and the cat her two familiars, as they all sat by the fire together. It would have been quite in keeping with the appearance of the party if they had all sprung up the chimney in a high wind one night, and never been heard of any more.

This, however, never came to pass. The cat, and Paul, and Mrs Pipchin, were constantly to be found in their usual places after dark; and Paul, eschewing the companionship of Master Bitherstone, went on studying Mrs Pipchin, and the cat, and the fire, night after night, as if they were a book of necromancy, in three volumes.

Mrs Wickam put her own construction on Paul's eccentricities; and being confirmed in her low spirits by a perplexed view of chimneys from the room where she was accustomed to sit, and by the noise of the wind, and by the general dulness (gashliness was Mrs Wickam's strong expression) of her present life, deduced the most dismal reflections from the foregoing premises. It was a part of Mrs Pipchin's policy to prevent her own 'young hussy' - that was Mrs Pipchin's generic name for female servant - from communicating with Mrs Wickam: to which end she devoted much of her time to concealing herself behind doors, and springing out on that devoted maiden, whenever she made an approach towards Mrs Wickam's apartment. But Berry was free to hold what converse she could in that quarter, consistently with the discharge of the multifarious duties at which she toiled incessantly from morning to night; and to Berry Mrs Wickam unburdened her mind.

'What a pretty fellow he is when he's asleep!' said Berry, stopping to look at Paul in bed, one night when she took up Mrs Wickam's supper.

'Ah!' sighed Mrs Wickam. 'He need be.'

'Why, he's not ugly when he's awake,' observed Berry.

'No, Ma'am. Oh, no. No more was my Uncle's Betsey Jane,' said Mrs Wickam.

Berry looked as if she would like to trace the connexion of ideas between Paul Dombey and Mrs Wickam's Uncle's Betsey Jane

'My Uncle's wife,' Mrs Wickam went on to say, 'died just like his Mama. My Uncle's child took on just as Master Paul do.'

'Took on! You don't think he grieves for his Mama, sure?' argued Berry, sitting down on the side of the bed. 'He can't remember anything about her, you know, Mrs Wickam. It's not possible.'

'No, Ma'am,' said Mrs Wickam 'No more did my Uncle's child. But my Uncle's child said very strange things sometimes, and looked very strange, and went on very strange, and was very strange altogether. My Uncle's child made people's blood run cold, some times, she did!'

'How?' asked Berry.

'I wouldn't have sat up all night alone with Betsey Jane!' said Mrs Wickam, 'not if you'd have put Wickam into business next morning for himself. I couldn't have done it, Miss Berry.'

Miss Berry naturally asked why not? But Mrs Wickam, agreeably to the usage of some ladies in her condition, pursued her own branch of the subject, without any compunction.

'Betsey Jane,' said Mrs Wickam, 'was as sweet a child as I could wish to see. I couldn't wish to see a sweeter. Everything that a child could have in the way of illnesses, Betsey Jane had come through. The cramps was as common to her,' said Mrs Wickam, 'as biles is to yourself, Miss Berry.' Miss Berry involuntarily wrinkled her nose.

'But Betsey Jane,' said Mrs Wickam, lowering her voice, and looking round the room, and towards Paul in bed, 'had been minded, in her cradle, by her departed mother. I couldn't say how, nor I couldn't say when, nor I couldn't say whether the dear child knew it or not, but Betsey Jane had been watched by her mother, Miss Berry!' and Mrs Wickam, with a very white face, and with watery eyes, and with a

tremulous voice, again looked fearfully round the room, and towards Paul in bed.

'Nonsense!' cried Miss Berry - somewhat resentful of the idea.

'You may say nonsense! I ain't offended, Miss. I hope you may be able to think in your own conscience that it is nonsense; you'll find your spirits all the better for it in this - you'll excuse my being so free - in this burying-ground of a place; which is wearing of me down. Master Paul's a little restless in his sleep. Pat his back, if you please.'

'Of course you think,' said Berry, gently doing what she was asked, 'that he has been nursed by his mother, too?'

'Betsey Jane,' returned Mrs Wickam in her most solemn tones, 'was put upon as that child has been put upon, and changed as that child has changed. I have seen her sit, often and often, think, think, thinking, like him. I have seen her look, often and often, old, old, old, like him. I have heard her, many a time, talk just like him. I consider that child and Betsey Jane on the same footing entirely, Miss Berry.'

'Is your Uncle's child alive?' asked Berry.

'Yes, Miss, she is alive,' returned Mrs Wickam with an air of triumph, for it was evident. Miss Berry expected the reverse; 'and is married to a silver-chaser. Oh yes, Miss, SHE is alive,' said Mrs Wickam, laying strong stress on her nominative case.

It being clear that somebody was dead, Mrs Pipchin's niece inquired who it was.

'I wouldn't wish to make you uneasy,' returned Mrs Wickam, pursuing her supper. Don't ask me.'

This was the surest way of being asked again. Miss Berry repeated her question, therefore; and after some resistance, and reluctance, Mrs Wickam laid down her knife, and again glancing round the room and at Paul in bed, replied:

'She took fancies to people; whimsical fancies, some of them; others, affections that one might expect to see - only stronger than common. They all died.'

This was so very unexpected and awful to Mrs Pipchin's niece, that she sat upright on the hard edge of the bedstead, breathing short, and surveying her informant with looks of undisguised alarm.

Mrs Wickam shook her left fore-finger stealthily towards the bed where Florence lay; then turned it upside down, and made several emphatic points at the floor; immediately below which was the parlour in which Mrs Pipchin habitually consumed the toast.

'Remember my words, Miss Berry,' said Mrs Wickam, 'and be thankful that Master Paul is not too fond of you. I am, that he's not too fond of me, I assure you; though there isn't much to live for - you'll excuse my being so free - in this jail of a house!'

Miss Berry's emotion might have led to her patting Paul too hard on the back, or might have produced a cessation of that soothing monotony, but he turned in his bed just now, and, presently awaking, sat up in it with his hair hot and wet from the effects of some childish dream, and asked for Florence.

She was out of her own bed at the first sound of his voice; and bending over his pillow immediately, sang him to sleep again. Mrs Wickam shaking her head, and letting fall several tears, pointed out the little group to Berry, and turned her eyes up to the ceiling.

'He's asleep now, my dear,' said Mrs Wickam after a pause, 'you'd better go to bed again. Don't you feel cold?'

'No, nurse,' said Florence, laughing. 'Not at all.'

'Ah!' sighed Mrs Wickam, and she shook her head again, expressing to the watchful Berry, 'we shall be cold enough, some of us, by and by!'

Berry took the frugal supper-tray, with which Mrs Wickam had by this time done, and bade her good-night.

'Good-night, Miss!' returned Wickam softly. 'Good-night! Your aunt is an old lady, Miss Berry, and it's what you must have looked for, often.'

This consolatory farewell, Mrs Wickam accompanied with a look of heartfelt anguish; and being left alone with the two children again, and becoming conscious that the wind was blowing mournfully, she indulged in melancholy - that cheapest and most accessible of luxuries - until she was overpowered by slumber.

Although the niece of Mrs Pipchin did not expect to find that exemplary dragon prostrate on the hearth-rug when she went downstairs, she was relieved to find her unusually fractious and severe, and with every present appearance of intending to live a long time to be a comfort to all who knew her. Nor had she any symptoms of declining, in the course of the ensuing week, when the constitutional viands still continued to disappear in regular

succession, notwithstanding that Paul studied her as attentively as ever, and occupied his usual seat between the black skirts and the fender, with unwavering constancy.

But as Paul himself was no stronger at the expiration of that time than he had been on his first arrival, though he looked much healthier in the face, a little carriage was got for him, in which he could lie at his ease, with an alphabet and other elementary works of reference, and be wheeled down to the sea-side. Consistent in his odd tastes, the child set aside a ruddy-faced lad who was proposed as the drawer of this carriage, and selected, instead, his grandfather - a weazen, old, crab-faced man, in a suit of battered oilskin, who had got tough and stringy from long pickling in salt water, and who smelt like a weedy sea-beach when the tide is out.

With this notable attendant to pull him along, and Florence always walking by his side, and the despondent Wickam bringing up the rear, he went down to the margin of the ocean every day; and there he would sit or lie in his carriage for hours together: never so distressed as by the company of children - Florence alone excepted, always.

'Go away, if you please,' he would say to any child who came to bear him company. Thank you, but I don't want you.'

Some small voice, near his ear, would ask him how he was, perhaps.

'I am very well, I thank you,' he would answer. 'But you had better go and play, if you please.'

Then he would turn his head, and watch the child away, and say to Florence, 'We don't want any others, do we? Kiss me, Floy.'

He had even a dislike, at such times, to the company of Wickam, and was well pleased when she strolled away, as she generally did, to pick up shells and acquaintances. His favourite spot was quite a lonely one, far away from most loungers; and with Florence sitting by his side at work, or reading to him, or talking to him, and the wind blowing on his face, and the water coming up among the wheels of his bed, he wanted nothing more.

'Floy,' he said one day, 'where's India, where that boy's friends live?'

'Oh, it's a long, long distance off,' said Florence, raising her eyes from her work.

'Weeks off?' asked Paul.

'Yes dear. Many weeks' journey, night and day.'

'If you were in India, Floy,' said Paul, after being silent for a minute, 'I should - what is it that Mama did? I forget.'

'Loved me!' answered Florence.

'No, no. Don't I love you now, Floy? What is it? - Died. in you were in India, I should die, Floy.'

She hurriedly put her work aside, and laid her head down on his pillow, caressing him. And so would she, she said, if he were there. He would be better soon.

'Oh! I am a great deal better now!' he answered. 'I don't mean that. I mean that I should die of being so sorry and so lonely, Floy!'

Another time, in the same place, he fell asleep, and slept quietly for a long time. Awaking suddenly, he listened, started up, and sat listening.

Florence asked him what he thought he heard.

'I want to know what it says,' he answered, looking steadily in her face. 'The sea' Floy, what is it that it keeps on saying?'

She told him that it was only the noise of the rolling waves.

'Yes, yes,' he said. 'But I know that they are always saying something. Always the same thing. What place is over there?' He rose up, looking eagerly at the horizon.

She told him that there was another country opposite, but he said he didn't mean that: he meant further away - farther away!

Very often afterwards, in the midst of their talk, he would break off, to try to understand what it was that the waves were always saying; and would rise up in his couch to look towards that invisible region, far away.