Chapter XIV - Paul grows more and more Old-fashioned, and goes Home for the Holidays

When the Midsummer vacation approached, no indecent manifestations of joy were exhibited by the leaden-eyed young gentlemen assembled at Doctor Blimber's. Any such violent expression as 'breaking up,' would have been quite inapplicable to that polite establishment. The young gentlemen oozed away, semi-annually, to their own homes; but they never broke up. They would have scorned the action.

Tozer, who was constantly galled and tormented by a starched white cambric neckerchief, which he wore at the express desire of Mrs Tozer, his parent, who, designing him for the Church, was of opinion that he couldn't be in that forward state of preparation too soon - Tozer said, indeed, that choosing between two evils, he thought he would rather stay where he was, than go home. However inconsistent this declaration might appear with that passage in Tozer's Essay on the subject, wherein he had observed 'that the thoughts of home and all its recollections, awakened in his mind the most pleasing emotions of anticipation and delight,' and had also likened himself to a Roman General, flushed with a recent victory over the Iceni, or laden with Carthaginian spoil, advancing within a few hours' march of the Capitol, presupposed, for the purposes of the simile, to be the dwelling-place of Mrs Tozer, still it was very sincerely made. For it seemed that Tozer had a dreadful Uncle, who not only volunteered examinations of him, in the holidays, on abstruse points, but twisted innocent events and things, and wrenched them to the same fell purpose. So that if this Uncle took him to the Play, or, on a similar pretence of kindness, carried him to see a Giant, or a Dwarf, or a Conjuror, or anything, Tozer knew he had read up some classical allusion to the subject beforehand, and was thrown into a state of mortal apprehension: not foreseeing where he might break out, or what authority he might not quote against him.

As to Briggs, his father made no show of artifice about it. He never would leave him alone. So numerous and severe were the mental trials of that unfortunate youth in vacation time, that the friends of the family (then resident near Bayswater, London) seldom approached the ornamental piece of water in Kensington Gardens,' without a vague expectation of seeing Master Briggs's hat floating on the surface, and an unfinished exercise lying on the bank. Briggs, therefore, was not at all sanguine on the subject of holidays; and these two sharers of little Paul's bedroom were so fair a sample of the young gentlemen in general, that the most elastic among them contemplated the arrival of those festive periods with genteel resignation.

It was far otherwise with little Paul. The end of these first holidays was to witness his separation from Florence, but who ever looked forward to the end of holidays whose beginning was not yet come! Not Paul, assuredly. As the happy time drew near, the lions and tigers climbing up the bedroom walls became quite tame and frolicsome. The grim sly faces in the squares and diamonds of the floor-cloth, relaxed and peeped out at him with less wicked eyes. The grave old clock had more of personal interest in the tone of its formal inquiry; and the restless sea went rolling on all night, to the sounding of a melancholy strain - yet it was pleasant too - that rose and fell with the waves, and rocked him, as it were, to sleep.

Mr Feeder, B.A., seemed to think that he, too, would enjoy the holidays very much. Mr Toots projected a life of holidays from that time forth; for, as he regularly informed Paul every day, it was his 'last half' at Doctor Blimber's, and he was going to begin to come into his property directly.

It was perfectly understood between Paul and Mr Toots, that they were intimate friends, notwithstanding their distance in point of years and station. As the vacation approached, and Mr Toots breathed harder and stared oftener in Paul's society, than he had done before, Paul knew that he meant he was sorry they were going to lose sight of each other, and felt very much obliged to him for his patronage and good opinion.

It was even understood by Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber, as well as by the young gentlemen in general, that Toots had somehow constituted himself protector and guardian of Dombey, and the circumstance became so notorious, even to Mrs Pipchin, that the good old creature cherished feelings of bitterness and jealousy against Toots; and, in the sanctuary of her own home, repeatedly denounced him as a 'chuckle-headed noodle.' Whereas the innocent Toots had no more idea of awakening Mrs Pipchin's wrath, than he had of any other definite possibility or proposition. On the contrary, he was disposed to consider her rather a remarkable character, with many points of interest about her. For this reason he smiled on her with so much urbanity, and asked her how she did, so often, in the course of her visits to little Paul, that at last she one night told him plainly, she wasn't used to it, whatever he might think; and she could not, and she would not bear it, either from himself or any other puppy then existing: at which unexpected acknowledgment of his civilities, Mr Toots was so alarmed that he secreted himself in a retired spot until she had gone. Nor did he ever again face the doughty Mrs Pipchin, under Doctor Blimber's roof.

They were within two or three weeks of the holidays, when, one day, Cornelia Blimber called Paul into her room, and said, 'Dombey, I am going to send home your analysis.'

'Thank you, Ma'am,' returned Paul.

'You know what I mean, do you, Dombey?' inquired Miss Blimber, looking hard at him, through the spectacles.

'No, Ma'am,' said Paul.

'Dombey, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber, 'I begin to be afraid you are a sad boy. When you don't know the meaning of an expression, why don't you seek for information?'

'Mrs Pipchin told me I wasn't to ask questions,' returned Paul.

'I must beg you not to mention Mrs Pipchin to me, on any account, Dombey,' returned Miss Blimber. 'I couldn't think of allowing it. The course of study here, is very far removed from anything of that sort. A repetition of such allusions would make it necessary for me to request to hear, without a mistake, before breakfast-time to-morrow morning, from Verbum personale down to simillimia cygno.'

'I didn't mean, Ma'am - ' began little Paul.

'I must trouble you not to tell me that you didn't mean, if you please, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber, who preserved an awful politeness in her admonitions. 'That is a line of argument I couldn't dream of permitting.'

Paul felt it safest to say nothing at all, so he only looked at Miss Blimber's spectacles. Miss Blimber having shaken her head at him gravely, referred to a paper lying before her.

'‘Analysis of the character of P. Dombey.’ If my recollection serves me,' said Miss Blimber breaking off, 'the word analysis as opposed to synthesis, is thus defined by Walker. ‘The resolution of an object, whether of the senses or of the intellect, into its first elements.’ As opposed to synthesis, you observe. Now you know what analysis is, Dombey.'

Dombey didn't seem to be absolutely blinded by the light let in upon his intellect, but he made Miss Blimber a little bow.

'‘Analysis," resumed Miss Blimber, casting her eye over the paper, '‘of the character of P. Dombey.’ I find that the natural capacity of Dombey is extremely good; and that his general disposition to study

may be stated in an equal ratio. Thus, taking eight as our standard and highest number, I find these qualities in Dombey stated each at six three-fourths!'

Miss Blimber paused to see how Paul received this news. Being undecided whether six three-fourths meant six pounds fifteen, or sixpence three farthings, or six foot three, or three quarters past six, or six somethings that he hadn't learnt yet, with three unknown something elses over, Paul rubbed his hands and looked straight at Miss Blimber. It happened to answer as well as anything else he could have done; and Cornelia proceeded.

'"Violence two. Selfishness two. Inclination to low company, as evinced in the case of a person named Glubb, originally seven, but since reduced. Gentlemanly demeanour four, and improving with advancing years.' Now what I particularly wish to call your attention to, Dombey, is the general observation at the close of this analysis.'

Paul set himself to follow it with great care.

'"It may be generally observed of Dombey," said Miss Blimber, reading in a loud voice, and at every second word directing her spectacles towards the little figure before her: '"that his abilities and inclinations are good, and that he has made as much progress as under the circumstances could have been expected. But it is to be lamented of this young gentleman that he is singular (what is usually termed old-fashioned) in his character and conduct, and that, without presenting anything in either which distinctly calls for reprobation, he is often very unlike other young gentlemen of his age and social position.' Now, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber, laying down the paper, 'do you understand that?'

'I think I do, Ma'am,' said Paul.

'This analysis, you see, Dombey,' Miss Blimber continued, 'is going to be sent home to your respected parent. It will naturally be very painful to him to find that you are singular in your character and conduct. It is naturally painful to us; for we can't like you, you know, Dombey, as well as we could wish.'

She touched the child upon a tender point. He had secretly become more and more solicitous from day to day, as the time of his departure drew more near, that all the house should like him. From some hidden reason, very imperfectly understood by himself - if understood at all - he felt a gradually increasing impulse of affection, towards almost everything and everybody in the place. He could not bear to think that they would be quite indifferent to him when he was gone. He wanted them to remember him kindly; and he had made it his

business even to conciliate a great hoarse shaggy dog, chained up at the back of the house, who had previously been the terror of his life: that even he might miss him when he was no longer there.

Little thinking that in this, he only showed again the difference between himself and his compeers, poor tiny Paul set it forth to Miss Blimber as well as he could, and begged her, in despite of the official analysis, to have the goodness to try and like him. To Mrs Blimber, who had joined them, he preferred the same petition: and when that lady could not forbear, even in his presence, from giving utterance to her often-repeated opinion, that he was an odd child, Paul told her that he was sure she was quite right; that he thought it must be his bones, but he didn't know; and that he hoped she would overlook it, for he was fond of them all.

'Not so fond,' said Paul, with a mixture of timidity and perfect frankness, which was one of the most peculiar and most engaging qualities of the child, 'not so fond as I am of Florence, of course; that could never be. You couldn't expect that, could you, Ma'am?'

'Oh! the old-fashioned little soul!' cried Mrs Blimber, in a whisper.

'But I like everybody here very much,' pursued Paul, 'and I should grieve to go away, and think that anyone was glad that I was gone, or didn't care.'

Mrs Blimber was now quite sure that Paul was the oddest child in the world; and when she told the Doctor what had passed, the Doctor did not controvert his wife's opinion. But he said, as he had said before, when Paul first came, that study would do much; and he also said, as he had said on that occasion, 'Bring him on, Cornelia! Bring him on!'

Cornelia had always brought him on as vigorously as she could; and Paul had had a hard life of it. But over and above the getting through his tasks, he had long had another purpose always present to him, and to which he still held fast. It was, to be a gentle, useful, quiet little fellow, always striving to secure the love and attachment of the rest; and though he was yet often to be seen at his old post on the stairs, or watching the waves and clouds from his solitary window, he was oftener found, too, among the other boys, modestly rendering them some little voluntary service. Thus it came to pass, that even among those rigid and absorbed young anchorites, who mortified themselves beneath the roof of Doctor Blimber, Paul was an object of general interest; a fragile little plaything that they all liked, and that no one would have thought of treating roughly. But he could not change his nature, or rewrite the analysis; and so they all agreed that Dombey was old-fashioned.

There were some immunities, however, attaching to the character enjoyed by no one else. They could have better spared a newer-fashioned child, and that alone was much. When the others only bowed to Doctor Blimber and family on retiring for the night, Paul would stretch out his morsel of a hand, and boldly shake the Doctor's; also Mrs Blimber's; also Cornelia's. If anybody was to be begged off from impending punishment, Paul was always the delegate. The weak-eyed young man himself had once consulted him, in reference to a little breakage of glass and china. And it was darKly rumoured that the butler, regarding him with favour such as that stern man had never shown before to mortal boy, had sometimes mingled porter with his table-beer to make him strong.

Over and above these extensive privileges, Paul had free right of entry to Mr Feeder's room, from which apartment he had twice led Mr Toots into the open air in a state of faintness, consequent on an unsuccessful attempt to smoke a very blunt cigar: one of a bundle which that young gentleman had covertly purchased on the shingle from a most desperate smuggler, who had acknowledged, in confidence, that two hundred pounds was the price set upon his head, dead or alive, by the Custom House. It was a snug room, Mr Feeder's, with his bed in another little room inside of it; and a flute, which Mr Feeder couldn't play yet, but was going to make a point of learning, he said, hanging up over the fireplace. There were some books in it, too, and a fishing-rod; for Mr Feeder said he should certainly make a point of learning to fish, when he could find time. Mr Feeder had amassed, with similar intentions, a beautiful little curly secondhand key-bugle, a chess-board and men, a Spanish Grammar, a set of sketching materials, and a pair of boxing-gloves. The art of self-defence Mr Feeder said he should undoubtedly make a point of learning, as he considered it the duty of every man to do; for it might lead to the protection of a female in distress. But Mr Feeder's great possession was a large green jar of snuff, which Mr Toots had brought down as a present, at the close of the last vacation; and for which he had paid a high price, having been the genuine property of the Prince Regent. Neither Mr Toots nor Mr Feeder could partake of this or any other snuff, even in the most stinted and moderate degree, without being seized with convulsions of sneezing. Nevertheless it was their great delight to moisten a box-full with cold tea, stir it up on a piece of parchment with a paper-knife, and devote themselves to its consumption then and there. In the course of which cramming of their noses, they endured surprising torments with the constancy of martyrs: and, drinking table-beer at intervals, felt all the glories of dissipation.

To little Paul sitting silent in their company, and by the side of his chief patron, Mr Toots, there was a dread charm in these reckless occasions: and when Mr Feeder spoke of the dark mysteries of

London, and told Mr Toots that he was going to observe it himself closely in all its ramifications in the approaching holidays, and for that purpose had made arrangements to board with two old maiden ladies at Peckham, Paul regarded him as if he were the hero of some book of travels or wild adventure, and was almost afraid of such a slashing person.

Going into this room one evening, when the holidays were very near, Paul found Mr Feeder filling up the blanks in some printed letters, while some others, already filled up and strewn before him, were being folded and sealed by Mr Toots. Mr Feeder said, 'Aha, Dombey, there you are, are you?' - for they were always kind to him, and glad to see him - and then said, tossing one of the letters towards him, 'And there you are, too, Dombey. That's yours.'

'Mine, Sir?' said Paul.

'Your invitation,' returned Mr Feeder.

Paul, looking at it, found, in copper-plate print, with the exception of his own name and the date, which were in Mr Feeder's penmanship, that Doctor and Mrs Blimber requested the pleasure of Mr P. Dombey's company at an early party on Wednesday Evening the Seventeenth Instant; and that the hour was half-past seven o'clock; and that the object was Quadrilles. Mr Toots also showed him, by holding up a companion sheet of paper, that Doctor and Mrs Blimber requested the pleasure of Mr Toots's company at an early party on Wednesday Evening the Seventeenth Instant, when the hour was half-past seven o'clock, and when the object was Quadrilles. He also found, on glancing at the table where Mr Feeder sat, that the pleasure of Mr Briggs's company, and of Mr Tozer's company, and of every young gentleman's company, was requested by Doctor and Mrs Blimber on the same genteel Occasion.

Mr Feeder then told him, to his great joy, that his sister was invited, and that it was a half-yearly event, and that, as the holidays began that day, he could go away with his sister after the party, if he liked, which Paul interrupted him to say he would like, very much. Mr Feeder then gave him to understand that he would be expected to inform Doctor and Mrs Blimber, in superfine small-hand, that Mr P. Dombey would be happy to have the honour of waiting on them, in accordance with their polite invitation. Lastly, Mr Feeder said, he had better not refer to the festive occasion, in the hearing of Doctor and Mrs Blimber; as these preliminaries, and the whole of the arrangements, were conducted on principles of classicality and high breeding; and that Doctor and Mrs Blimber on the one hand, and the young gentlemen on the other, were supposed, in their scholastic capacities, not to have the least idea of what was in the wind.

Paul thanked Mr Feeder for these hints, and pocketing his invitation, sat down on a stool by the side of Mr Toots, as usual. But Paul's head, which had long been ailing more or less, and was sometimes very heavy and painful, felt so uneasy that night, that he was obliged to support it on his hand. And yet it dropped so, that by little and little it sunk on Mr Toots's knee, and rested there, as if it had no care to be ever lifted up again.

That was no reason why he should be deaf; but he must have been, he thought, for, by and by, he heard Mr Feeder calling in his ear, and gently shaking him to rouse his attention. And when he raised his head, quite scared, and looked about him, he found that Doctor Blimber had come into the room; and that the window was open, and that his forehead was wet with sprinkled water; though how all this had been done without his knowledge, was very curious indeed.

'Ah! Come, come! That's well! How is my little friend now?' said Doctor Blimber, encouragingly.

'Oh, quite well, thank you, Sir,' said Paul.

But there seemed to be something the matter with the floor, for he couldn't stand upon it steadily; and with the walls too, for they were inclined to turn round and round, and could only be stopped by being looked at very hard indeed. Mr Toots's head had the appearance of being at once bigger and farther off than was quite natural; and when he took Paul in his arms, to carry him upstairs, Paul observed with astonishment that the door was in quite a different place from that in which he had expected to find it, and almost thought, at first, that Mr Toots was going to walk straight up the chimney.

It was very kind of Mr Toots to carry him to the top of the house so tenderly; and Paul told him that it was. But Mr Toots said he would do a great deal more than that, if he could; and indeed he did more as it was: for he helped Paul to undress, and helped him to bed, in the kindest manner possible, and then sat down by the bedside and chuckled very much; while Mr Feeder, B.A., leaning over the bottom of the bedstead, set all the little bristles on his head bolt upright with his bony hands, and then made believe to spar at Paul with great science, on account of his being all right again, which was so uncommonly facetious, and kind too in Mr Feeder, that Paul, not being able to make up his mind whether it was best to laugh or cry at him, did both at once.

How Mr Toots melted away, and Mr Feeder changed into Mrs Pipchin, Paul never thought of asking; neither was he at all curious to know; but when he saw Mrs Pipchin standing at the bottom of the bed, instead of Mr Feeder, he cried out, 'Mrs Pipchin, don't tell Florence!'

'Don't tell Florence what, my little Paul?' said Mrs Pipchin, coming round to the bedside, and sitting down in the chair.

'About me,' said Paul.

'No, no,' said Mrs Pipchin.

'What do you think I mean to do when I grow up, Mrs Pipchin?' inquired Paul, turning his face towards her on his pillow, and resting his chin wistfully on his folded hands.

Mrs Pipchin couldn't guess.

'I mean,' said Paul, 'to put my money all together in one Bank, never try to get any more, go away into the country with my darling Florence, have a beautiful garden, fields, and woods, and live there with her all my life!'

'Indeed!' cried Mrs Pipchin.

'Yes,' said Paul. 'That's what I mean to do, when I - ' He stopped, and pondered for a moment.

Mrs Pipchin's grey eye scanned his thoughtful face.

'If I grow up,' said Paul. Then he went on immediately to tell Mrs Pipchin all about the party, about Florence's invitation, about the pride he would have in the admiration that would be felt for her by all the boys, about their being so kind to him and fond of him, about his being so fond of them, and about his being so glad of it. Then he told Mrs Pipchin about the analysis, and about his being certainly old-fashioned, and took Mrs Pipchin's opinion on that point, and whether she knew why it was, and what it meant. Mrs Pipchin denied the fact altogether, as the shortest way of getting out of the difficulty; but Paul was far from satisfied with that reply, and looked so searchingly at Mrs Pipchin for a truer answer, that she was obliged to get up and look out of the window to avoid his eyes.

There was a certain calm Apothecary, 'who attended at the establishment when any of the young gentlemen were ill, and somehow he got into the room and appeared at the bedside, with Mrs Blimber. How they came there, or how long they had been there, Paul didn't know; but when he saw them, he sat up in bed, and answered all the Apothecary's questions at full length, and whispered to him that Florence was not to know anything about it, if he pleased, and that he had set his mind upon her coming to the party. He was very chatty with the Apothecary, and they parted excellent friends. Lying down again with his eyes shut, he heard the Apothecary say, out of

the room and quite a long way off - or he dreamed it - that there was a want of vital power (what was that, Paul wondered!) and great constitutional weakness. That as the little fellow had set his heart on parting with his school-mates on the seventeenth, it would be better to indulge the fancy if he grew no worse. That he was glad to hear from Mrs Pipchin, that the little fellow would go to his friends in London on the eighteenth. That he would write to Mr Dombey, when he should have gained a better knowledge of the case, and before that day. That there was no immediate cause for - what? Paul lost that word And that the little fellow had a fine mind, but was an old-fashioned boy.

What old fashion could that be, Paul wondered with a palpitating heart, that was so visibly expressed in him; so plainly seen by so many people!

He could neither make it out, nor trouble himself long with the effort. Mrs Pipchin was again beside him, if she had ever been away (he thought she had gone out with the Doctor, but it was all a dream perhaps), and presently a bottle and glass got into her hands magically, and she poured out the contents for him. After that, he had some real good jelly, which Mrs Blimber brought to him herself; and then he was so well, that Mrs Pipchin went home, at his urgent solicitation, and Briggs and Tozer came to bed. Poor Briggs grumbled terribly about his own analysis, which could hardly have discomposed him more if it had been a chemical process; but he was very good to Paul, and so was Tozer, and so were all the rest, for they every one looked in before going to bed, and said, 'How are you now, Dombey?' 'Cheer up, little Dombey!' and so forth. After Briggs had got into bed, he lay awake for a long time, still bemoaning his analysis, and saying he knew it was all wrong, and they couldn't have analysed a murderer worse, and - how would Doctor Blimber like it if his pocket-money depended on it? It was very easy, Briggs said, to make a galley-slave of a boy all the half-year, and then score him up idle; and to crib two dinners a-week out of his board, and then score him up greedy; but that wasn't going to be submitted to, he believed, was it? Oh! Ah!

Before the weak-eyed young man performed on the gong next morning, he came upstairs to Paul and told him he was to lie still, which Paul very gladly did. Mrs Pipchin reappeared a little before the Apothecary, and a little after the good young woman whom Paul had seen cleaning the stove on that first morning (how long ago it seemed now!) had brought him his breakfast. There was another consultation a long way off, or else Paul dreamed it again; and then the Apothecary, coming back with Doctor and Mrs Blimber, said:

'Yes, I think, Doctor Blimber, we may release this young gentleman from his books just now; the vacation being so very near at hand.'

'By all means,' said Doctor Blimber. 'My love, you will inform Cornelia, if you please.'

'Assuredly,' said Mrs Blimber.

The Apothecary bending down, looked closely into Paul's eyes, and felt his head, and his pulse, and his heart, with so much interest and care, that Paul said, 'Thank you, Sir.'

'Our little friend,' observed Doctor Blimber, 'has never complained.'

'Oh no!' replied the Apothecary. 'He was not likely to complain.'

'You find him greatly better?' said Doctor Blimber.

'Oh! he is greatly better, Sir,' returned the Apothecary.

Paul had begun to speculate, in his own odd way, on the subject that might occupy the Apothecary's mind just at that moment; so musingly had he answered the two questions of Doctor Blimber. But the Apothecary happening to meet his little patient's eyes, as the latter set off on that mental expedition, and coming instantly out of his abstraction with a cheerful smile, Paul smiled in return and abandoned it.

He lay in bed all that day, dozing and dreaming, and looking at Mr Toots; but got up on the next, and went downstairs. Lo and behold, there was something the matter with the great clock; and a workman on a pair of steps had taken its face off, and was poking instruments into the works by the light of a candle! This was a great event for Paul, who sat down on the bottom stair, and watched the operation attentively: now and then glancing at the clock face, leaning all askew, against the wall hard by, and feeling a little confused by a suspicion that it was ogling him.

The workman on the steps was very civil; and as he said, when he observed Paul, 'How do you do, Sir?' Paul got into conversation with him, and told him he hadn't been quite well lately. The ice being thus broken, Paul asked him a multitude of questions about chimes and clocks: as, whether people watched up in the lonely church steeples by night to make them strike, and how the bells were rung when people died, and whether those were different bells from wedding bells, or only sounded dismal in the fancies of the living. Finding that his new acquaintance was not very well informed on the subject of the Curfew Bell of ancient days, Paul gave him an account of that institution; and also asked him, as a practical man, what he thought about King Alfred's idea of measuring time by the burning of candles; to which the workman replied, that he thought it would be the ruin of

the clock trade if it was to come up again. In fine, Paul looked on, until the clock had quite recovered its familiar aspect, and resumed its sedate inquiry; when the workman, putting away his tools in a long basket, bade him good day, and went away. Though not before he had whispered something, on the door-mat, to the footman, in which there was the phrase 'old-fashioned' - for Paul heard it. What could that old fashion be, that seemed to make the people sorry! What could it be!

Having nothing to learn now, he thought of this frequently; though not so often as he might have done, if he had had fewer things to think of. But he had a great many; and was always thinking, all day long.

First, there was Florence coming to the party. Florence would see that the boys were fond of him; and that would make her happy. This was his great theme. Let Florence once be sure that they were gentle and good to him, and that he had become a little favourite among them, and then the would always think of the time he had passed there, without being very sorry. Florence might be all the happier too for that, perhaps, when he came back.

When he came back! Fifty times a day, his noiseless little feet went up the stairs to his own room, as he collected every book, and scrap, and trifle that belonged to him, and put them all together there, down to the minutest thing, for taking home! There was no shade of coming back on little Paul; no preparation for it, or other reference to it, grew out of anything he thought or did, except this slight one in connexion with his sister. On the contrary, he had to think of everything familiar to him, in his contemplative moods and in his wanderings about the house, as being to be parted with; and hence the many things he had to think of, all day long.

He had to peep into those rooms upstairs, and think how solitary they would be when he was gone, and wonder through how many silent days, weeks, months, and years, they would continue just as grave and undisturbed. He had to think - would any other child (old-fashioned, like himself stray there at any time, to whom the same grotesque distortions of pattern and furniture would manifest themselves; and would anybody tell that boy of little Dombey, who had been there once? He had to think of a portrait on the stairs, which always looked earnestly after him as he went away, eyeing it over his shoulder; and which, when he passed it in the company of anyone, still seemed to gaze at him, and not at his companion. He had much to think of, in association with a print that hung up in another place, where, in the centre of a wondering group, one figure that he knew, a figure with a light about its head - benignant, mild, and merciful - stood pointing upward.

At his own bedroom window, there were crowds of thoughts that mixed with these, and came on, one upon another, like the rolling waves. Where those wild birds lived, that were always hovering out at sea in troubled weather; where the clouds rose and first began; whence the wind issued on its rushing flight, and where it stopped; whether the spot where he and Florence had so often sat, and watched, and talked about these things, could ever be exactly as it used to be without them; whether it could ever be the same to Florence, if he were in some distant place, and she were sitting there alone.

He had to think, too, of Mr Toots, and Mr Feeder, B.A., of all the boys; and of Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber; of home, and of his aunt and Miss Tox; of his father; Dombey and Son, Walter with the poor old Uncle who had got the money he wanted, and that gruff-voiced Captain with the iron hand. Besides all this, he had a number of little visits to pay, in the course of the day; to the schoolroom, to Doctor Blimber's study, to Mrs Blimber's private apartment, to Miss Blimber's, and to the dog. For he was free of the whole house now, to range it as he chose; and, in his desire to part with everybody on affectionate terms, he attended, in his way, to them all. Sometimes he found places in books for Briggs, who was always losing them; sometimes he looked up words in dictionaries for other young gentlemen who were in extremity; sometimes he held skeins of silk for Mrs Blimber to wind; sometimes he put Cornelia's desk to rights; sometimes he would even creep into the Doctor's study, and, sitting on the carpet near his learned feet, turn the globes softly, and go round the world, or take a flight among the far-off stars.

In those days immediately before the holidays, in short, when the other young gentlemen were labouring for dear life through a general resumption of the studies of the whole half-year, Paul was such a privileged pupil as had never been seen in that house before. He could hardly believe it himself; but his liberty lasted from hour to hour, and from day to day; and little Dombey was caressed by everyone. Doctor Blimber was so particular about him, that he requested Johnson to retire from the dinner-table one day, for having thoughtlessly spoken to him as 'poor little Dombey;' which Paul thought rather hard and severe, though he had flushed at the moment, and wondered why Johnson should pity him. It was the more questionable justice, Paul thought, in the Doctor, from his having certainly overheard that great authority give his assent on the previous evening, to the proposition (stated by Mrs Blimber) that poor dear little Dombey was more old-fashioned than ever. And now it was that Paul began to think it must surely be old-fashioned to be very thin, and light, and easily tired, and soon disposed to lie down anywhere and rest; for he couldn't help feeling that these were more and more his habits every day.

At last the party-day arrived; and Doctor Blimber said at breakfast, 'Gentlemen, we will resume our studies on the twenty-fifth of next month.' Mr Toots immediately threw off his allegiance, and put on his ring: and mentioning the Doctor in casual conversation shortly afterwards, spoke of him as 'Blimber'! This act of freedom inspired the older pupils with admiration and envy; but the younger spirits were appalled, and seemed to marvel that no beam fell down and crushed him.

Not the least allusion was made to the ceremonies of the evening, either at breakfast or at dinner; but there was a bustle in the house all day, and in the course of his perambulations, Paul made acquaintance with various strange benches and candlesticks, and met a harp in a green greatcoat standing on the landing outside the drawing-room door. There was something queer, too, about Mrs Blimber's head at dinner-time, as if she had screwed her hair up too tight; and though Miss Blimber showed a graceful bunch of plaited hair on each temple, she seemed to have her own little curls in paper underneath, and in a play-bill too; for Paul read 'Theatre Royal' over one of her sparkling spectacles, and 'Brighton' over the other. There was a grand array of white waistcoats and cravats in the young gentlemen's bedrooms as evening approached; and such a smell of singed hair, that Doctor Blimber sent up the footman with his compliments, and wished to know if the house was on fire. But it was only the hairdresser curling the young gentlemen, and over-heating his tongs in the ardour of business.

When Paul was dressed - which was very soon done, for he felt unwell and drowsy, and was not able to stand about it very long - he went down into the drawing-room; where he found Doctor Blimber pacing up and down the room full dressed, but with a dignified and unconcerned demeanour, as if he thought it barely possible that one or two people might drop in by and by. Shortly afterwards, Mrs Blimber appeared, looking lovely, Paul thought; and attired in such a number of skirts that it was quite an excursion to walk round her. Miss Blimber came down soon after her Mama; a little squeezed in appearance, but very charming.

Mr Toots and Mr Feeder were the next arrivals. Each of these gentlemen brought his hat in his hand, as if he lived somewhere else; and when they were announced by the butler, Doctor Blimber said, 'Ay, ay, ay! God bless my soul!' and seemed extremely glad to see them. Mr Toots was one blaze of jewellery and buttons; and he felt the circumstance so strongly, that when he had shaken hands with the Doctor, and had bowed to Mrs Blimber and Miss Blimber, he took Paul aside, and said, 'What do you think of this, Dombey?'

But notwithstanding this modest confidence in himself, Mr Toots appeared to be involved in a good deal of uncertainty whether, on the whole, it was judicious to button the bottom button of his waistcoat, and whether, on a calm revision of all the circumstances, it was best to wear his waistbands turned up or turned down. Observing that Mr Feeder's were turned up, Mr Toots turned his up; but the waistbands of the next arrival being turned down, Mr Toots turned his down. The differences in point of waistcoat-buttoning, not only at the bottom, but at the top too, became so numerous and complicated as the arrivals thickened, that Mr Toots was continually fingering that article of dress, as if he were performing on some instrument; and appeared to find the incessant execution it demanded, quite bewildering. All the young gentlemen, tightly cravatted, curled, and pumped, and with their best hats in their hands, having been at different times announced and introduced, Mr Baps, the dancing-master, came, accompanied by Mrs Baps, to whom Mrs Blimber was extremely kind and condescending. Mr Baps was a very grave gentleman, with a slow and measured manner of speaking; and before he had stood under the lamp five minutes, he began to talk to Toots (who had been silently comparing pumps with him) about what you were to do with your raw materials when they came into your ports in return for your drain of gold. Mr Toots, to whom the question seemed perplexing, suggested 'Cook 'em.' But Mr Baps did not appear to think that would do.

Paul now slipped away from the cushioned corner of a sofa, which had been his post of observation, and went downstairs into the tea-room to be ready for Florence, whom he had not seen for nearly a fortnight, as he had remained at Doctor Blimber's on the previous Saturday and Sunday, lest he should take cold. Presently she came: looking so beautiful in her simple ball dress, with her fresh flowers in her hand, that when she knelt down on the ground to take Paul round the neck and kiss him (for there was no one there, but his friend and another young woman waiting to serve out the tea), he could hardly make up his mind to let her go again, or to take away her bright and loving eyes from his face.

'But what is the matter, Floy?' asked Paul, almost sure that he saw a tear there.

'Nothing, darling; nothing,' returned Florence.

Paul touched her cheek gently with his finger - and it was a tear! 'Why, Floy!' said he.

'We'll go home together, and I'll nurse you, love,' said Florence.

'Nurse me!' echoed Paul.

Paul couldn't understand what that had to do with it, nor why the two young women looked on so seriously, nor why Florence turned away her face for a moment, and then turned it back, lighted up again with smiles.

'Floy,' said Paul, holding a ringlet of her dark hair in his hand. 'Tell me, dear, Do you think I have grown old-fashioned?'

His sister laughed, and fondled him, and told him 'No.'

'Because I know they say so,' returned Paul, 'and I want to know what they mean, Floy.' But a loud double knock coming at the door, and Florence hurrying to the table, there was no more said between them. Paul wondered again when he saw his friend whisper to Florence, as if she were comforting her; but a new arrival put that out of his head speedily.

It was Sir Barnet Skettles, Lady Skettles, and Master Skettles. Master Skettles was to be a new boy after the vacation, and Fame had been busy, in Mr Feeder's room, with his father, who was in the House of Commons, and of whom Mr Feeder had said that when he did catch the Speaker's eye (which he had been expected to do for three or four years), it was anticipated that he would rather touch up the Radicals.

'And what room is this now, for instance?' said Lady Skettles to Paul's friend, 'Melia.

'Doctor Blimber's study, Ma'am,' was the reply.

Lady Skettles took a panoramic survey of it through her glass, and said to Sir Barnet Skettles, with a nod of approval, 'Very good.' Sir Barnet assented, but Master Skettles looked suspicious and doubtful.

'And this little creature, now,' said Lady Skettles, turning to Paul. 'Is he one of the

'Young gentlemen, Ma'am; yes, Ma'am,' said Paul's friend.

'And what is your name, my pale child?' said Lady Skettles.

'Dombey,' answered Paul.

Sir Barnet Skettles immediately interposed, and said that he had had the honour of meeting Paul's father at a public dinner, and that he hoped he was very well. Then Paul heard him say to Lady Skettles, 'City - very rich - most respectable - Doctor mentioned it.' And then he said to Paul, 'Will you tell your good Papa that Sir Barnet Skettles

rejoiced to hear that he was very well, and sent him his best compliments?'

'Yes, Sir,' answered Paul.

'That is my brave boy,' said Sir Barnet Skettles. 'Barnet,' to Master Skettles, who was revenging himself for the studies to come, on the plum-cake, 'this is a young gentleman you ought to know. This is a young gentleman you may know, Barnet,' said Sir Barnet Skettles, with an emphasis on the permission.

'What eyes! What hair! What a lovely face!' exclaimed Lady Skettles softly, as she looked at Florence through her glass. 'My sister,' said Paul, presenting her.

The satisfaction of the Skettleses was now complex And as Lady Skettles had conceived, at first sight, a liking for Paul, they all went upstairs together: Sir Barnet Skettles taking care of Florence, and young Barnet following.

Young Barnet did not remain long in the background after they had reached the drawing-room, for Dr Blimber had him out in no time, dancing with Florence. He did not appear to Paul to be particularly happy, or particularly anything but sulky, or to care much what he was about; but as Paul heard Lady Skettles say to Mrs Blimber, while she beat time with her fan, that her dear boy was evidently smitten to death by that angel of a child, Miss Dombey, it would seem that Skettles Junior was in a state of bliss, without showing it.

Little Paul thought it a singular coincidence that nobody had occupied his place among the pillows; and that when he came into the room again, they should all make way for him to go back to it, remembering it was his. Nobody stood before him either, when they observed that he liked to see Florence dancing, but they left the space in front quite clear, so that he might follow her with his eyes. They were so kind, too, even the strangers, of whom there were soon a great many, that they came and spoke to him every now and then, and asked him how he was, and if his head ached, and whether he was tired. He was very much obliged to them for all their kindness and attention, and reclining propped up in his corner, with Mrs Blimber and Lady Skettles on the same sofa, and Florence coming and sitting by his side as soon as every dance was ended, he looked on very happily indeed.

Florence would have sat by him all night, and would not have danced at all of her own accord, but Paul made her, by telling her how much it pleased him. And he told her the truth, too; for his small heart swelled, and his face glowed, when he saw how much they all admired her, and how she was the beautiful little rosebud of the room.

From his nest among the pillows, Paul could see and hear almost everything that passed as if the whole were being done for his amusement. Among other little incidents that he observed, he observed Mr Baps the dancing-master get into conversation with Sir Barnet Skettles, and very soon ask him, as he had asked Mr Toots, what you were to do with your raw materials, when they came into your ports in return for your drain of gold - which was such a mystery to Paul that he was quite desirous to know what ought to be done with them. Sir Barnet Skettles had much to say upon the question, and said it; but it did not appear to solve the question, for Mr Baps retorted, Yes, but supposing Russia stepped in with her tallows; which struck Sir Barnet almost dumb, for he could only shake his head after that, and say, Why then you must fall back upon your cottons, he supposed.

Sir Barnet Skettles looked after Mr Baps when he went to cheer up Mrs Baps (who, being quite deserted, was pretending to look over the music-book of the gentleman who played the harp), as if he thought him a remarkable kind of man; and shortly afterwards he said so in those words to Doctor Blimber, and inquired if he might take the liberty of asking who he was, and whether he had ever been in the Board of Trade. Doctor Blimber answered no, he believed not; and that in fact he was a Professor of - '

'Of something connected with statistics, I'll swear?' observed Sir Barnet Skettles.

'Why no, Sir Barnet,' replied Doctor Blimber, rubbing his chin. 'No, not exactly.'

'Figures of some sort, I would venture a bet,' said Sir Barnet Skettles.

'Why yes,' said Doctor Blimber, yes, but not of that sort. Mr Baps is a very worthy sort of man, Sir Barnet, and - in fact he's our Professor of dancing.'

Paul was amazed to see that this piece of information quite altered Sir Barnet Skettles's opinion of Mr Baps, and that Sir Barnet flew into a perfect rage, and glowered at Mr Baps over on the other side of the room. He even went so far as to D Mr Baps to Lady Skettles, in telling her what had happened, and to say that it was like his most con-sum-mate and con-foun-ded impudence.

There was another thing that Paul observed. Mr Feeder, after imbibing several custard-cups of negus, began to enjoy himself. The dancing in general was ceremonious, and the music rather solemn - a little like church music in fact - but after the custard-cups, Mr Feeder told Mr Toots that he was going to throw a little spirit into the thing. After

that, Mr Feeder not only began to dance as if he meant dancing and nothing else, but secretly to stimulate the music to perform wild tunes. Further, he became particular in his attentions to the ladies; and dancing with Miss Blimber, whispered to her - whispered to her! - though not so softly but that Paul heard him say this remarkable poetry,

'Had I a heart for falsehood framed,

I ne'er could injure You!' This, Paul heard him repeat to four young ladies, in succession. Well might Mr Feeder say to Mr Toots, that he was afraid he should be the worse for it to-morrow!

Mrs Blimber was a little alarmed by this - comparatively speaking - profligate behaviour; and especially by the alteration in the character of the music, which, beginning to comprehend low melodies that were popular in the streets, might not unnaturally be supposed to give offence to Lady Skettles. But Lady Skettles was so very kind as to beg Mrs Blimber not to mention it; and to receive her explanation that Mr Feeder's spirits sometimes betrayed him into excesses on these occasions, with the greatest courtesy and politeness; observing, that he seemed a very nice sort of person for his situation, and that she particularly liked the unassuming style of his hair - which (as already hinted) was about a quarter of an inch long.

Once, when there was a pause in the dancing, Lady Skettles told Paul that he seemed very fond of music. Paul replied, that he was; and if she was too, she ought to hear his sister, Florence, sing. Lady Skettles presently discovered that she was dying with anxiety to have that gratification; and though Florence was at first very much frightened at being asked to sing before so many people, and begged earnestly to be excused, yet, on Paul calling her to him, and saying, 'Do, Floy! Please! For me, my dear!' she went straight to the piano, and began. When they all drew a little away, that Paul might see her; and when he saw her sitting there all alone, so young, and good, and beautiful, and kind to him; and heard her thrilling voice, so natural and sweet, and such a golden link between him and all his life's love and happiness, rising out of the silence; he turned his face away, and hid his tears. Not, as he told them when they spoke to him, not that the music was too plaintive or too sorrowful, but it was so dear to him.

They all loved Florence. How could they help it! Paul had known beforehand that they must and would; and sitting in his cushioned corner, with calmly folded hands; and one leg loosely doubled under him, few would have thought what triumph and delight expanded his childish bosom while he watched her, or what a sweet tranquillity he felt. Lavish encomiums on 'Dombey's sister' reached his ears from all the boys: admiration of the self-possessed and modest little beauty

was on every lip: reports of her intelligence and accomplishments floated past him, constantly; and, as if borne in upon the air of the summer night, there was a half intelligible sentiment diffused around, referring to Florence and himself, and breathing sympathy for both, that soothed and touched him.

He did not know why. For all that the child observed, and felt, and thought, that night - the present and the absent; what was then and what had been - were blended like the colours in the rainbow, or in the plumage of rich birds when the sun is shining on them, or in the softening sky when the same sun is setting. The many things he had had to think of lately, passed before him in the music; not as claiming his attention over again, or as likely evermore to occupy it, but as peacefully disposed of and gone. A solitary window, gazed through years ago, looked out upon an ocean, miles and miles away; upon its waters, fancies, busy with him only yesterday, were hushed and lulled to rest like broken waves. The same mysterious murmur he had wondered at, when lying on his couch upon the beach, he thought he still heard sounding through his sister's song, and through the hum of voices, and the tread of feet, and having some part in the faces flitting by, and even in the heavy gentleness of Mr Toots, who frequently came up to shake him by the hand. Through the universal kindness he still thought he heard it, speaking to him; and even his old-fashioned reputation seemed to be allied to it, he knew not how. Thus little Paul sat musing, listening, looking on, and dreaming; and was very happy.

Until the time arrived for taking leave: and then, indeed, there was a sensation in the party. Sir Barnet Skettles brought up Skettles Junior to shake hands with him, and asked him if he would remember to tell his good Papa, with his best compliments, that he, Sir Barnet Skettles, had said he hoped the two young gentlemen would become intimately acquainted. Lady Skettles kissed him, and patted his hair upon his brow, and held him in her arms; and even Mrs Baps - poor Mrs Baps! Paul was glad of that - came over from beside the music-book of the gentleman who played the harp, and took leave of him quite as heartily as anybody in the room.

'Good-bye, Doctor Blimber,' said Paul, stretching out his hand.

'Good-bye, my little friend,' returned the Doctor.

'I'm very much obliged to you, Sir,' said Paul, looking innocently up into his awful face. 'Ask them to take care of Diogenes, if you please.'

Diogenes was the dog: who had never in his life received a friend into his confidence, before Paul. The Doctor promised that every attention should he paid to Diogenes in Paul's absence, and Paul having again thanked him, and shaken hands with him, bade adieu to Mrs Blimber

and Cornelia with such heartfelt earnestness that Mrs Blimber forgot from that moment to mention Cicero to Lady Skettles, though she had fully intended it all the evening. Cornelia, taking both Paul's hands in hers, said,'Dombey, Dombey, you have always been my favourite pupil. God bless you!' And it showed, Paul thought, how easily one might do injustice to a person; for Miss Blimber meant it - though she was a Forcer - and felt it.

A boy then went round among the young gentlemen, of 'Dombey's going!' 'Little Dombey's going!' and there was a general move after Paul and Florence down the staircase and into the hall, in which the whole Blimber family were included. Such a circumstance, Mr Feeder said aloud, as had never happened in the case of any former young gentleman within his experience; but it would be difficult to say if this were sober fact or custard-cups. The servants, with the butler at their head, had all an interest in seeing Little Dombey go; and even the weak-eyed young man, taking out his books and trunks to the coach that was to carry him and Florence to Mrs Pipchin's for the night, melted visibly.

Not even the influence of the softer passion on the young gentlemen - and they all, to a boy, doted on Florence - could restrain them from taking quite a noisy leave of Paul; waving hats after him, pressing downstairs to shake hands with him, crying individually 'Dombey, don't forget me!' and indulging in many such ebullitions of feeling, uncommon among those young Chesterfields. Paul whispered Florence, as she wrapped him up before the door was opened, Did she hear them? Would she ever forget it? Was she glad to know it? And a lively delight was in his eyes as he spoke to her.

Once, for a last look, he turned and gazed upon the faces thus addressed to him, surprised to see how shining and how bright, and numerous they were, and how they were all piled and heaped up, as faces are at crowded theatres. They swam before him as he looked, like faces in an agitated glass; and next moment he was in the dark coach outside, holding close to Florence. From that time, whenever he thought of Doctor Blimber's, it came back as he had seen it in this last view; and it never seemed to be a real place again, but always a dream, full of eyes.

This was not quite the last of Doctor Blimber's, however. There was something else. There was Mr Toots. Who, unexpectedly letting down one of the coach-windows, and looking in, said, with a most egregious chuckle, 'Is Dombey there?' and immediately put it up again, without waiting for an answer. Nor was this quite the last of Mr Toots, even; for before the coachman could drive off, he as suddenly let down the other window, and looking in with a precisely similar chuckle, said in

a precisely similar tone of voice, 'Is Dombey there?' and disappeared precisely as before.

How Florence laughed! Paul often remembered it, and laughed himself whenever he did so.

But there was much, soon afterwards - next day, and after that - which Paul could only recollect confusedly. As, why they stayed at Mrs Pipchin's days and nights, instead of going home; why he lay in bed, with Florence sitting by his side; whether that had been his father in the room, or only a tall shadow on the wall; whether he had heard his doctor say, of someone, that if they had removed him before the occasion on which he had built up fancies, strong in proportion to his own weakness, it was very possible he might have pined away. He could not even remember whether he had often said to Florence, 'Oh Floy, take me home, and never leave me!' but he thought he had. He fancied sometimes he had heard himself repeating, 'Take me home, Floy! take me home!'

But he could remember, when he got home, and was carried up the well-remembered stairs, that there had been the rumbling of a coach for many hours together, while he lay upon the seat, with Florence still beside him, and old Mrs Pipchin sitting opposite. He remembered his old bed too, when they laid him down in it: his aunt, Miss Tox, and Susan: but there was something else, and recent too, that still perplexed him.

'I want to speak to Florence, if you please,' he said. 'To Florence by herself, for a moment!'

She bent down over him, and the others stood away.

'Floy, my pet, wasn't that Papa in the hall, when they brought me from the coach?'

'Yes, dear.'

'He didn't cry, and go into his room, Floy, did he, when he saw me coming in?'

Florence shook her head, and pressed her lips against his cheek.

'I'm very glad he didn't cry,' said little Paul. 'I thought he did. Don't tell them that I asked.'