Chapter X - Containing The Whole Science Of Government

The Circumlocution Office was (as everybody knows without being told) the most important Department under Government. No public business of any kind could possibly be done at any time without the acquiescence of the Circumlocution Office. Its finger was in the largest public pie, and in the smallest public tart. It was equally impossible to do the plainest right and to undo the plainest wrong without the express authority of the Circumlocution Office. If another Gunpowder Plot had been discovered half an hour before the lighting of the match, nobody would have been justified in saving the parliament until there had been half a score of boards, half a bushel of minutes, several sacks of official memoranda, and a family-vault full of ungrammatical correspondence, on the part of the Circumlocution Office.

This glorious establishment had been early in the field, when the one sublime principle involving the difficult art of governing a country, was first distinctly revealed to statesmen. It had been foremost to study that bright revelation and to carry its shining influence through the whole of the official proceedings. Whatever was required to be done, the Circumlocution Office was beforehand with all the public departments in the art of perceiving - HOW NOT TO DO IT.

Through this delicate perception, through the tact with which it invariably seized it, and through the genius with which it always acted on it, the Circumlocution Office had risen to overtop all the public departments; and the public condition had risen to be - what it was.

It is true that How not to do it was the great study and object of all public departments and professional politicians all round the Circumlocution Office. It is true that every new premier and every new government, coming in because they had upheld a certain thing as necessary to be done, were no sooner come in than they applied their utmost faculties to discovering How not to do it. It is true that from the moment when a general election was over, every returned man who had been raving on hustings because it hadn't been done, and who had been asking the friends of the honourable gentleman in the opposite interest on pain of impeachment to tell him why it hadn't been done, and who had been asserting that it must be done, and who had been pledging himself that it should be done, began to devise, How it was not to be done. It is true that the debates of both Houses of Parliament the whole session through, uniformly tended to the protracted deliberation, How not to do it. It is true that the royal speech at the opening of such session virtually said, My lords and gentlemen, you have a considerable stroke of work to do, and you will please to retire to your respective chambers, and discuss, How not to do it. It is true that the royal speech, at the close of such session, virtually said, My lords and gentlemen, you have through several

laborious months been considering with great loyalty and patriotism, How not to do it, and you have found out; and with the blessing of Providence upon the harvest (natural, not political), I now dismiss you. All this is true, but the Circumlocution Office went beyond it.

Because the Circumlocution Office went on mechanically, every day, keeping this wonderful, all-sufficient wheel of statesmanship, How not to do it, in motion. Because the Circumlocution Office was down upon any ill-advised public servant who was going to do it, or who appeared to be by any surprising accident in remote danger of doing it, with a minute, and a memorandum, and a letter of instructions that extinguished him. It was this spirit of national efficiency in the Circumlocution Office that had gradually led to its having something to do with everything. Mechanicians, natural philosophers, soldiers, sailors, petitioners, memorialists, people with grievances, people who wanted to prevent grievances, people who wanted to redress grievances, jobbing people, jobbed people, people who couldn't get rewarded for merit, and people who couldn't get punished for demerit, were all indiscriminately tucked up under the foolscap paper of the Circumlocution Office.

Numbers of people were lost in the Circumlocution Office. Unfortunates with wrongs, or with projects for the general welfare (and they had better have had wrongs at first, than have taken that bitter English recipe for certainly getting them), who in slow lapse of time and agony had passed safely through other public departments; who, according to rule, had been bullied in this, over-reached by that, and evaded by the other; got referred at last to the Circumlocution Office, and never reappeared in the light of day. Boards sat upon them, secretaries minuted upon them, commissioners gabbled about them, clerks registered, entered, checked, and ticked them off, and they melted away. In short, all the business of the country went through the Circumlocution Office, except the business that never came out of it; and its name was Legion.

Sometimes, angry spirits attacked the Circumlocution Office. Sometimes, parliamentary questions were asked about it, and even parliamentary motions made or threatened about it by demagogues so low and ignorant as to hold that the real recipe of government was, How to do it. Then would the noble lord, or right honourable gentleman, in whose department it was to defend the Circumlocution Office, put an orange in his pocket, and make a regular field-day of the occasion. Then would he come down to that house with a slap upon the table, and meet the honourable gentleman foot to foot. Then would he be there to tell that honourable gentleman that the Circumlocution Office not only was blameless in this matter, but was commendable in this matter, was extollable to the skies in this matter. Then would he be there to tell that honourable gentleman that,

although the Circumlocution Office was invariably right and wholly right, it never was so right as in this matter. Then would he be there to tell that honourable gentleman that it would have been more to his honour, more to his credit, more to his good taste, more to his good sense, more to half the dictionary of commonplaces, if he had left the Circumlocution Office alone, and never approached this matter. Then would he keep one eye upon a coach or crammer from the Circumlocution Office sitting below the bar, and smash the honourable gentleman with the Circumlocution Office account of this matter. And although one of two things always happened; namely, either that the Circumlocution Office had nothing to say and said it, or that it had something to say of which the noble lord, or right honourable gentleman, blundered one half and forgot the other; the Circumlocution Office was always voted immaculate by an accommodating majority.

Such a nursery of statesmen had the Department become in virtue of a long career of this nature, that several solemn lords had attained the reputation of being quite unearthly prodigies of business, solely from having practised, How not to do it, as the head of the Circumlocution Office. As to the minor priests and acolytes of that temple, the result of all this was that they stood divided into two classes, and, down to the junior messenger, either believed in the Circumlocution Office as a heaven-born institution that had an absolute right to do whatever it liked; or took refuge in total infidelity, and considered it a flagrant nuisance.

The Barnacle family had for some time helped to administer the Circumlocution Office. The Tite Barnacle Branch, indeed, considered themselves in a general way as having vested rights in that direction, and took it ill if any other family had much to say to it. The Barnacles were a very high family, and a very large family. They were dispersed all over the public offices, and held all sorts of public places. Either the nation was under a load of obligation to the Barnacles, or the Barnacles were under a load of obligation to the nation. It was not quite unanimously settled which; the Barnacles having their opinion, the nation theirs.

The Mr Tite Barnacle who at the period now in question usually coached or crammed the statesman at the head of the Circumlocution Office, when that noble or right honourable individual sat a little uneasily in his saddle by reason of some vagabond making a tilt at him in a newspaper, was more flush of blood than money. As a Barnacle he had his place, which was a snug thing enough; and as a Barnacle he had of course put in his son Barnacle Junior in the office. But he had intermarried with a branch of the Stiltstalkings, who were also better endowed in a sanguineous point of view than with real or personal property, and of this marriage there had been issue,

Barnacle junior and three young ladies. What with the patrician requirements of Barnacle junior, the three young ladies, Mrs Tite Barnacle nee Stiltstalking, and himself, Mr Tite Barnacle found the intervals between quarter day and quarter day rather longer than he could have desired; a circumstance which he always attributed to the country's parsimony. For Mr Tite Barnacle, Mr Arthur Clennam made his fifth inquiry one day at the Circumlocution Office; having on previous occasions awaited that gentleman successively in a hall, a glass case, a waiting room, and a fire-proof passage where the Department seemed to keep its wind. On this occasion Mr Barnacle was not engaged, as he had been before, with the noble prodigy at the head of the Department; but was absent. Barnacle Junior, however, was announced as a lesser star, yet visible above the office horizon.

With Barnacle junior, he signified his desire to confer; and found that young gentleman singeing the calves of his legs at the parental fire, and supporting his spine against the mantel-shelf. It was a comfortable room, handsomely furnished in the higher official manner; an presenting stately suggestions of the absent Barnacle, in the thick carpet, the leather-covered desk to sit at, the leather-covered desk to stand at, the formidable easy-chair and hearth-rug, the interposed screen, the torn-up papers, the dispatch-boxes with little labels sticking out of them, like medicine bottles or dead game, the pervading smell of leather and mahogany, and a general bamboozling air of How not to do it.

The present Barnacle, holding Mr Clennam's card in his hand, had a youthful aspect, and the fluffiest little whisker, perhaps, that ever was seen. Such a downy tip was on his callow chin, that he seemed half fledged like a young bird; and a compassionate observer might have urged that, if he had not singed the calves of his legs, he would have died of cold. He had a superior eye-glass dangling round his neck, but unfortunately had such flat orbits to his eyes and such limp little eyelids that it wouldn't stick in when he put it up, but kept tumbling out against his waistcoat buttons with a click that discomposed him very much.

'Oh, I say. Look here! My father's not in the way, and won't be in the way to-day,' said Barnacle Junior. 'Is this anything that I can do?'

(Click! Eye-glass down. Barnacle Junior quite frightened and feeling all round himself, but not able to find it.)

'You are very good,' said Arthur Clennam. 'I wish however to see Mr Barnacle.'

'But I say. Look here! You haven't got any appointment, you know,' said Barnacle Junior.

(By this time he had found the eye-glass, and put it up again.)

'No,' said Arthur Clennam. 'That is what I wish to have.'

'But I say. Look here! Is this public business?' asked Barnacle junior.

(Click! Eye-glass down again. Barnacle Junior in that state of search after it that Mr Clennam felt it useless to reply at present.)

'Is it,' said Barnacle junior, taking heed of his visitor's brown face, 'anything about - Tonnage - or that sort of thing?'

(Pausing for a reply, he opened his right eye with his hand, and stuck his glass in it, in that inflammatory manner that his eye began watering dreadfully.)

'No,' said Arthur, 'it is nothing about tonnage.'

'Then look here. Is it private business?'

'I really am not sure. It relates to a Mr Dorrit.'

'Look here, I tell you what! You had better call at our house, if you are going that way. Twenty-four, Mews Street, Grosvenor Square. My father's got a slight touch of the gout, and is kept at home by it.'

(The misguided young Barnacle evidently going blind on his eye- glass side, but ashamed to make any further alteration in his painful arrangements.)

'Thank you. I will call there now. Good morning.' Young Barnacle seemed discomfited at this, as not having at all expected him to go.

'You are quite sure,' said Barnacle junior, calling after him when he got to the door, unwilling wholly to relinquish the bright business idea he had conceived; 'that it's nothing about Tonnage?'

'Quite sure.'

With such assurance, and rather wondering what might have taken place if it HAD been anything about tonnage, Mr Clennam withdrew to pursue his inquiries.

Mews Street, Grosvenor Square, was not absolutely Grosvenor Square itself, but it was very near it. It was a hideous little street of dead wall, stables, and dunghills, with lofts over coach-houses inhabited by coachmen's families, who had a passion for drying clothes and decorating their window-sills with miniature turnpike- gates. The

principal chimney-sweep of that fashionable quarter lived at the blind end of Mews Street; and the same corner contained an establishment much frequented about early morning and twilight for the purchase of wine-bottles and kitchen-stuff. Punch's shows used to lean against the dead wall in Mews Street, while their proprietors were dining elsewhere; and the dogs of the neighbourhood made appointments to meet in the same locality. Yet there were two or three small airless houses at the entrance end of Mews Street, which went at enormous rents on account of their being abject hangers-on to a fashionable situation; and whenever one of these fearful little coops was to be let (which seldom happened, for they were in great request), the house agent advertised it as a gentlemanly residence in the most aristocratic part of town, inhabited solely by the elite of the beau monde.

If a gentlemanly residence coming strictly within this narrow margin had not been essential to the blood of the Barnacles, this particular branch would have had a pretty wide selection among, let us say, ten thousand houses, offering fifty times the accommodation for a third of the money. As it was, Mr Barnacle, finding his gentlemanly residence extremely inconvenient and extremely dear, always laid it, as a public servant, at the door of the country, and adduced it as another instance of the country's parsimony.

Arthur Clennam came to a squeezed house, with a ramshackle bowed front, little dingy windows, and a little dark area like a damp waistcoat-pocket, which he found to be number twenty-four, Mews Street, Grosvenor Square. To the sense of smell the house was like a sort of bottle filled with a strong distillation of Mews; and when the footman opened the door, he seemed to take the stopper out.

The footman was to the Grosvenor Square footmen, what the house was to the Grosvenor Square houses. Admirable in his way, his way was a back and a bye way. His gorgeousness was not unmixed with dirt; and both in complexion and consistency he had suffered from the closeness of his pantry. A sallow flabbiness was upon him when he took the stopper out, and presented the bottle to Mr Clennam's nose.

'Be so good as to give that card to Mr Tite Barnacle, and to say that I have just now seen the younger Mr Barnacle, who recommended me to call here.'

The footman (who had as many large buttons with the Barnacle crest upon them on the flaps of his pockets, as if he were the family strong box, and carried the plate and jewels about with him buttoned up) pondered over the card a little; then said, 'Walk in.'

It required some judgment to do it without butting the inner hall- door open, and in the consequent mental confusion and physical darkness

slipping down the kitchen stairs. The visitor, however, brought himself up safely on the door-mat.

Still the footman said 'Walk in,' so the visitor followed him. At the inner hall-door, another bottle seemed to be presented and another stopper taken out. This second vial appeared to be filled with concentrated provisions and extract of Sink from the pantry. After a skirmish in the narrow passage, occasioned by the footman's opening the door of the dismal dining-room with confidence, finding some one there with consternation, and backing on the visitor with disorder, the visitor was shut up, pending his announcement, in a close back parlour. There he had an opportunity of refreshing himself with both the bottles at once, looking out at a low blinding wall three feet off, and speculating on the number of Barnacle families within the bills of mortality who lived in such hutches of their own free flunkey choice.

Mr Barnacle would see him. Would he walk up-stairs? He would, and he did; and in the drawing-room, with his leg on a rest, he found Mr Barnacle himself, the express image and presentment of How not to do it.

Mr Barnacle dated from a better time, when the country was not so parsimonious and the Circumlocution Office was not so badgered. He wound and wound folds of white cravat round his neck, as he wound and wound folds of tape and paper round the neck of the country. His wristbands and collar were oppressive; his voice and manner were oppressive. He had a large watch-chain and bunch of seals, a coat buttoned up to inconvenience, a waistcoat buttoned up to inconvenience, an unwrinkled pair of trousers, a stiff pair of boots. He was altogether splendid, massive, overpowering, and impracticable. He seemed to have been sitting for his portrait to Sir Thomas Lawrence all the days of his life.

'Mr Clennam?' said Mr Barnacle. 'Be seated.'

Mr Clennam became seated.

'You have called on me, I believe,' said Mr Barnacle, 'at the Circumlocution - ' giving it the air of a word of about five-and- twenty syllables - 'Office.'

'I have taken that liberty.'

Mr Barnacle solemnly bent his head as who should say, 'I do not deny that it is a liberty; proceed to take another liberty, and let me know your business.'

'Allow me to observe that I have been for some years in China, am quite a stranger at home, and have no personal motive or interest in the inquiry I am about to make.'

Mr Barnacle tapped his fingers on the table, and, as if he were now sitting for his portrait to a new and strange artist, appeared to say to his visitor, 'If you will be good enough to take me with my present lofty expression, I shall feel obliged.'

'I have found a debtor in the Marshalsea Prison of the name of Dorrit, who has been there many years. I wish to investigate his confused affairs so far as to ascertain whether it may not be possible, after this lapse of time, to ameliorate his unhappy condition. The name of Mr Tite Barnacle has been mentioned to me as representing some highly influential interest among his creditors. Am I correctly informed?'

It being one of the principles of the Circumlocution Office never, on any account whatever, to give a straightforward answer, Mr Barnacle said, 'Possibly.'

'On behalf of the Crown, may I ask, or as private individual?'

'The Circumlocution Department, sir,' Mr Barnacle replied, 'may have possibly recommended - possibly - I cannot say - that some public claim against the insolvent estate of a firm or copartnership to which this person may have belonged, should be enforced. The question may have been, in the course of official business, referred to the Circumlocution Department for its consideration. The Department may have either originated, or confirmed, a Minute making that recommendation.'

'I assume this to be the case, then.'

'The Circumlocution Department,' said Mr Barnacle, 'is not responsible for any gentleman's assumptions.'

'May I inquire how I can obtain official information as to the real state of the case?'

'It is competent,' said Mr Barnacle, 'to any member of the - Public,' mentioning that obscure body with reluctance, as his natural enemy, 'to memorialise the Circumlocution Department. Such formalities as are required to be observed in so doing, may be known on application to the proper branch of that Department.'

'Which is the proper branch?'

'I must refer you,' returned Mr Barnacle, ringing the bell, 'to the Department itself for a formal answer to that inquiry.'

'Excuse my mentioning - '

'The Department is accessible to the - Public,' Mr Barnacle was always checked a little by that word of impertinent signification, 'if the - Public approaches it according to the official forms; if the - Public does not approach it according to the official forms, the - Public has itself to blame.'

Mr Barnacle made him a severe bow, as a wounded man of family, a wounded man of place, and a wounded man of a gentlemanly residence, all rolled into one; and he made Mr Barnacle a bow, and was shut out into Mews Street by the flabby footman.

Having got to this pass, he resolved as an exercise in perseverance, to betake himself again to the Circumlocution Office, and try what satisfaction he could get there. So he went back to the Circumlocution Office, and once more sent up his card to Barnacle junior by a messenger who took it very ill indeed that he should come back again, and who was eating mashed potatoes and gravy behind a partition by the hall fire.

He was readmitted to the presence of Barnacle junior, and found that young gentleman singeing his knees now, and gaping his weary way on to four o'clock. 'I say. Look here. You stick to us in a devil of a manner,' Said Barnacle junior, looking over his shoulder.

'I want to know - '

'Look here. Upon my soul you mustn't come into the place saying you want to know, you know,' remonstrated Barnacle junior, turning about and putting up the eye-glass.

'I want to know,' said Arthur Clennam, who had made up his mind to persistence in one short form of words, 'the precise nature of the claim of the Crown against a prisoner for debt, named Dorrit.'

'I say. Look here. You really are going it at a great pace, you know. Egad, you haven't got an appointment,' said Barnacle junior, as if the thing were growing serious.

'I want to know,' said Arthur, and repeated his case.

Barnacle junior stared at him until his eye-glass fell out, and then put it in again and stared at him until it fell out again. 'You have no right to come this sort of move,' he then observed with the greatest

weakness. 'Look here. What do you mean? You told me you didn't know whether it was public business or not.'

'I have now ascertained that it is public business,' returned the suitor, 'and I want to know' - and again repeated his monotonous inquiry.

Its effect upon young Barnacle was to make him repeat in a defenceless way, 'Look here! Upon my SOUL you mustn't come into the place saying you want to know, you know!' The effect of that upon Arthur Clennam was to make him repeat his inquiry in exactly the same words and tone as before. The effect of that upon young Barnacle was to make him a wonderful spectacle of failure and helplessness.

'Well, I tell you what. Look here. You had better try the Secretarial Department,' he said at last, sidling to the bell and ringing it. 'Jenkinson,' to the mashed potatoes messenger, 'Mr Wobbler!'

Arthur Clennam, who now felt that he had devoted himself to the storming of the Circumlocution Office, and must go through with it, accompanied the messenger to another floor of the building, where that functionary pointed out Mr Wobbler's room. He entered that apartment, and found two gentlemen sitting face to face at a large and easy desk, one of whom was polishing a gun-barrel on his pocket-handkerchief, while the other was spreading marmalade on bread with a paper-knife.

'Mr Wobbler?' inquired the suitor.

Both gentlemen glanced at him, and seemed surprised at his assurance.

'So he went,' said the gentleman with the gun-barrel, who was an extremely deliberate speaker, 'down to his cousin's place, and took the Dog with him by rail. Inestimable Dog. Flew at the porter fellow when he was put into the dog-box, and flew at the guard when he was taken out. He got half-a-dozen fellows into a Barn, and a good supply of Rats, and timed the Dog. Finding the Dog able to do it immensely, made the match, and heavily backed the Dog. When the match came off, some devil of a fellow was bought over, Sir, Dog was made drunk, Dog's master was cleaned out.'

'Mr Wobbler?' inquired the suitor.

The gentleman who was spreading the marmalade returned, without looking up from that occupation, 'What did he call the Dog?'

'Called him Lovely,' said the other gentleman. 'Said the Dog was the perfect picture of the old aunt from whom he had expectations. Found him particularly like her when hocussed.'

'Mr Wobbler?' said the suitor.

Both gentlemen laughed for some time. The gentleman with the gun-barrel, considering it, on inspection, in a satisfactory state, referred it to the other; receiving confirmation of his views, he fitted it into its place in the case before him, and took out the stock and polished that, softly whistling.

'Mr Wobbler?' said the suitor.

'What's the matter?' then said Mr Wobbler, with his mouth full.

'I want to know - ' and Arthur Clennam again mechanically set forth what he wanted to know.

'Can't inform you,' observed Mr Wobbler, apparently to his lunch. 'Never heard of it. Nothing at all to do with it. Better try Mr Clive, second door on the left in the next passage.'

'Perhaps he will give me the same answer.'

'Very likely. Don't know anything about it,' said Mr Wobbler.

The suitor turned away and had left the room, when the gentleman with the gun called out 'Mister! Hallo!'

He looked in again.

'Shut the door after you. You're letting in a devil of a draught here!' A few steps brought him to the second door on the left in the next passage. In that room he found three gentlemen; number one doing nothing particular, number two doing nothing particular, number three doing nothing particular. They seemed, however, to be more directly concerned than the others had been in the effective execution of the great principle of the office, as there was an awful inner apartment with a double door, in which the Circumlocution Sages appeared to be assembled in council, and out of which there was an imposing coming of papers, and into which there was an imposing going of papers, almost constantly; wherein another gentleman, number four, was the active instrument.

'I want to know,' said Arthur Clennam, - and again stated his case in the same barrel-organ way. As number one referred him to number two, and as number two referred him to number three, he had

occasion to state it three times before they all referred him to number four, to whom he stated it again.

Number four was a vivacious, well-looking, well-dressed, agreeable young fellow - he was a Barnacle, but on the more sprightly side of the family - and he said in an easy way, 'Oh! you had better not bother yourself about it, I think.'

'Not bother myself about it?'

'No! I recommend you not to bother yourself about it.'

This was such a new point of view that Arthur Clennam found himself at a loss how to receive it.

'You can if you like. I can give you plenty of forms to fill up. Lots of 'em here. You can have a dozen if you like. But you'll never go on with it,' said number four.

'Would it be such hopeless work? Excuse me; I am a stranger in England.' 'I don't say it would be hopeless,' returned number four, with a frank smile. 'I don't express an opinion about that; I only express an opinion about you. I don't think you'd go on with it. However, of course, you can do as you like. I suppose there was a failure in the performance of a contract, or something of that kind, was there?'

'I really don't know.'

'Well! That you can find out. Then you'll find out what Department the contract was in, and then you'll find out all about it there.'

'I beg your pardon. How shall I find out?'

'Why, you'll - you'll ask till they tell you. Then you'll memorialise that Department (according to regular forms which you'll find out) for leave to memorialise this Department. If you get it (which you may after a time), that memorial must be entered in that Department, sent to be registered in this Department, sent back to be signed by that Department, sent back to be countersigned by this Department, and then it will begin to be regularly before that Department. You'll find out when the business passes through each of these stages by asking at both Departments till they tell you.'

'But surely this is not the way to do the business,' Arthur Clennam could not help saying.

This airy young Barnacle was quite entertained by his simplicity in supposing for a moment that it was. This light in hand young Barnacle knew perfectly that it was not. This touch and go young Barnacle had 'got up' the Department in a private secretaryship, that he might be ready for any little bit of fat that came to hand; and he fully understood the Department to be a politico-diplomatic hocus pocus piece of machinery for the assistance of the nobs in keeping off the snobs. This dashing young Barnacle, in a word, was likely to become a statesman, and to make a figure.

'When the business is regularly before that Department, whatever it is,' pursued this bright young Barnacle, 'then you can watch it from time to time through that Department. When it comes regularly before this Department, then you must watch it from time to time through this Department. We shall have to refer it right and left; and when we refer it anywhere, then you'll have to look it up. When it comes back to us at any time, then you had better look US up. When it sticks anywhere, you'll have to try to give it a jog. When you write to another Department about it, and then to this Department about it, and don't hear anything satisfactory about it, why then you had better - keep on writing.'

Arthur Clennam looked very doubtful indeed. 'But I am obliged to you at any rate,' said he, 'for your politeness.'

'Not at all,' replied this engaging young Barnacle. 'Try the thing, and see how you like it. It will be in your power to give it up at any time, if you don't like it. You had better take a lot of forms away with you. Give him a lot of forms!' With which instruction to number two, this sparkling young Barnacle took a fresh handful of papers from numbers one and three, and carried them into the sanctuary to offer to the presiding Idol of the Circumlocution Office.

Arthur Clennam put his forms in his pocket gloomily enough, and went his way down the long stone passage and the long stone staircase. He had come to the swing doors leading into the street, and was waiting, not over patiently, for two people who were between him and them to pass out and let him follow, when the voice of one of them struck familiarly on his ear. He looked at the speaker and recognised Mr Meagles. Mr Meagles was very red in the face - redder than travel could have made him - and collaring a short man who was with him, said, 'come out, you rascal, come Out!'

it was such an unexpected hearing, and it was also such an unexpected sight to see Mr Meagles burst the swing doors open, and emerge into the street with the short man, who was of an unoffending appearance, that Clennam stood still for the moment exchanging looks of surprise with the porter. He followed, however, quickly; and

saw Mr Meagles going down the street with his enemy at his side. He soon came up with his old travelling companion, and touched him on the back. The choleric face which Mr Meagles turned upon him smoothed when he saw who it was, and he put out his friendly hand. 'How are you?' said Mr Meagles. 'How d'ye do? I have only just come over from abroad. I am glad to see you.'

'And I am rejoiced to see you.'

'Thank'ee. Thank'ee!'

'Mrs Meagles and your daughter - ?'

'Are as well as possible,' said Mr Meagles. 'I only wish you had come upon me in a more prepossessing condition as to coolness.'

Though it was anything but a hot day, Mr Meagles was in a heated state that attracted the attention of the passersby; more particularly as he leaned his back against a railing, took off his hat and cravat, and heartily rubbed his steaming head and face, and his reddened ears and neck, without the least regard for public opinion.

'Whew!' said Mr Meagles, dressing again. 'That's comfortable. Now I am cooler.'

'You have been ruffled, Mr Meagles. What is the matter?'

'Wait a bit, and I'll tell you. Have you leisure for a turn in the Park?'

'As much as you please.'

'Come along then. Ah! you may well look at him.' He happened to have turned his eyes towards the offender whom Mr Meagles had so angrily collared. 'He's something to look at, that fellow is.'

He was not much to look at, either in point of size or in point of dress; being merely a short, square, practical looking man, whose hair had turned grey, and in whose face and forehead there were deep lines of cogitation, which looked as though they were carved in hard wood. He was dressed in decent black, a little rusty, and had the appearance of a sagacious master in some handicraft. He had a spectacle-case in his hand, which he turned over and over while he was thus in question, with a certain free use of the thumb that is never seen but in a hand accustomed to tools.

'You keep with us,' said Mr Meagles, in a threatening kind of Way, 'and I'll introduce you presently. Now then!'

Clennam wondered within himself, as they took the nearest way to the Park, what this unknown (who complied in the gentlest manner) could have been doing. His appearance did not at all justify the suspicion that he had been detected in designs on Mr Meagles's pocket-handkerchief; nor had he any appearance of being quarrelsome or violent. He was a quiet, plain, steady man; made no attempt to escape; and seemed a little depressed, but neither ashamed nor repentant. If he were a criminal offender, he must surely be an incorrigible hypocrite; and if he were no offender, why should Mr Meagles have collared him in the Circumlocution Office? He perceived that the man was not a difficulty in his own mind alone, but in Mr Meagles's too; for such conversation as they had together on the short way to the Park was by no means well sustained, and Mr Meagles's eye always wandered back to the man, even when he spoke of something very different.

At length they being among the trees, Mr Meagles stopped short, and said:

'Mr Clennam, will you do me the favour to look at this man? His name is Doyce, Daniel Doyce. You wouldn't suppose this man to be a notorious rascal; would you?'

'I certainly should not.' It was really a disconcerting question, with the man there.

'No. You would not. I know you would not. You wouldn't suppose him to be a public offender; would you?'

'No.'

'No. But he is. He is a public offender. What has he been guilty of? Murder, manslaughter, arson, forgery, swindling, house- breaking, highway robbery, larceny, conspiracy, fraud? Which should you say, now?'

'I should say,' returned Arthur Clennam, observing a faint smile in Daniel Doyce's face, 'not one of them.'

'You are right,' said Mr Meagles. 'But he has been ingenious, and he has been trying to turn his ingenuity to his country's service. That makes him a public offender directly, sir.'

Arthur looked at the man himself, who only shook his head.

'This Doyce,' said Mr Meagles, 'is a smith and engineer. He is not in a large way, but he is well known as a very ingenious man. A dozen years ago, he perfects an invention (involving a very curious secret

process) of great importance to his country and his fellow- creatures. I won't say how much money it cost him, or how many years of his life he had been about it, but he brought it to perfection a dozen years ago. Wasn't it a dozen?' said Mr Meagles, addressing Doyce. 'He is the most exasperating man in the world; he never complains!'

'Yes. Rather better than twelve years ago.'

'Rather better?' said Mr Meagles, 'you mean rather worse. Well, Mr Clennam, he addresses himself to the Government. The moment he addresses himself to the Government, he becomes a public offender! Sir,' said Mr Meagles, in danger of making himself excessively hot again, 'he ceases to be an innocent citizen, and becomes a culprit.

He is treated from that instant as a man who has done some infernal action. He is a man to be shirked, put off, brow-beaten, sneered at, handed over by this highly-connected young or old gentleman, to that highly-connected young or old gentleman, and dodged back again; he is a man with no rights in his own time, or his own property; a mere outlaw, whom it is justifiable to get rid of anyhow; a man to be worn out by all possible means.'

It was not so difficult to believe, after the morning's experience, as Mr Meagles supposed.

'Don't stand there, Doyce, turning your spectacle-case over and over,' cried Mr Meagles, 'but tell Mr Clennam what you confessed to me.'

'I undoubtedly was made to feel,' said the inventor, 'as if I had committed an offence. In dancing attendance at the various offices, I was always treated, more or less, as if it was a very bad offence. I have frequently found it necessary to reflect, for my own self-support, that I really had not done anything to bring myself into the Newgate Calendar, but only wanted to effect a great saving and a great improvement.'

'There!' said Mr Meagles. 'Judge whether I exaggerate. Now you'll be able to believe me when I tell you the rest of the case.'

With this prelude, Mr Meagles went through the narrative; the established narrative, which has become tiresome; the matter-of-course narrative which we all know by heart. How, after interminable attendance and correspondence, after infinite impertinences, ignorances, and insults, my lords made a Minute, number three thousand four hundred and seventy-two, allowing the culprit to make certain trials of his invention at his own expense.

How the trials were made in the presence of a board of six, of whom two ancient members were too blind to see it, two other ancient members were too deaf to hear it, one other ancient member was too lame to get near it, and the final ancient member was too pig- headed to look at it. How there were more years; more impertinences, ignorances, and insults. How my lords then made a Minute, number five thousand one hundred and three, whereby they resigned the business to the Circumlocution Office. How the Circumlocution Office, in course of time, took up the business as if it were a bran new thing of yesterday, which had never been heard of before; muddled the business, addled the business, tossed the business in a wet blanket. How the impertinences, ignorances, and insults went through the multiplication table. How there was a reference of the invention to three Barnacles and a Stiltstalking, who knew nothing about it; into whose heads nothing could be hammered about it; who got bored about it, and reported physical impossibilities about it. How the Circumlocution Office, in a Minute, number eight thousand seven hundred and forty, 'saw no reason to reverse the decision at which my lords had arrived.' How the Circumlocution Office, being reminded that my lords had arrived at no decision, shelved the business. How there had been a final interview with the head of the Circumlocution Office that very morning, and how the Brazen Head had spoken, and had been, upon the whole, and under all the circumstances, and looking at it from the various points of view, of opinion that one of two courses was to be pursued in respect of the business: that was to say, either to leave it alone for evermore, or to begin it all over again.

'Upon which,' said Mr Meagles, 'as a practical man, I then and there, in that presence, took Doyce by the collar, and told him it was plain to me that he was an infamous rascal and treasonable disturber of the government peace, and took him away. I brought him out of the office door by the collar, that the very porter might know I was a practical man who appreciated the official estimate of such characters; and here we are!'

If that airy young Barnacle had been there, he would have frankly told them perhaps that the Circumlocution Office had achieved its function. That what the Barnacles had to do, was to stick on to the national ship as long as they could. That to trim the ship, lighten the ship, clean the ship, would be to knock them off; that they could but be knocked off once; and that if the ship went down with them yet sticking to it, that was the ship's look out, and not theirs.

'There!' said Mr Meagles, 'now you know all about Doyce. Except, which I own does not improve my state of mind, that even now you don't hear him complain.'

'You must have great patience,' said Arthur Clennam, looking at him with some wonder, 'great forbearance.'

'No,' he returned, 'I don't know that I have more than another man.'

'By the Lord, you have more than I have, though!' cried Mr Meagles.

Doyce smiled, as he said to Clennam, 'You see, my experience of these things does not begin with myself. It has been in my way to know a little about them from time to time. Mine is not a particular case. I am not worse used than a hundred others who have put themselves in the same position - than all the others, I was going to say.'

'I don't know that I should find that a consolation, if it were my case; but I am very glad that you do.'

'Understand me! I don't say,' he replied in his steady, planning way, and looking into the distance before him as if his grey eye were measuring it, 'that it's recompense for a man's toil and hope; but it's a certain sort of relief to know that I might have counted on this.'

He spoke in that quiet deliberate manner, and in that undertone, which is often observable in mechanics who consider and adjust with great nicety. It belonged to him like his suppleness of thumb, or his peculiar way of tilting up his hat at the back every now and then, as if he were contemplating some half-finished work of his hand and thinking about it.

'Disappointed?' he went on, as he walked between them under the trees. 'Yes. No doubt I am disappointed. Hurt? Yes. No doubt I am hurt. That's only natural. But what I mean when I say that people who put themselves in the same position are mostly used in the same way - '

'In England,' said Mr Meagles.

'Oh! of course I mean in England. When they take their inventions into foreign countries, that's quite different. And that's the reason why so many go there.'

Mr Meagles very hot indeed again.

'What I mean is, that however this comes to be the regular way of our government, it is its regular way. Have you ever heard of any projector or inventor who failed to find it all but inaccessible, and whom it did not discourage and ill-treat?'

'I cannot say that I ever have.'

'Have you ever known it to be beforehand in the adoption of any useful thing? Ever known it to set an example of any useful kind?'

'I am a good deal older than my friend here,' said Mr Meagles, 'and I'll answer that. Never.'

'But we all three have known, I expect,' said the inventor, 'a pretty many cases of its fixed determination to be miles upon miles, and years upon years, behind the rest of us; and of its being found out persisting in the use of things long superseded, even after the better things were well known and generally taken up?'

They all agreed upon that.

'Well then,' said Doyce, with a sigh, 'as I know what such a metal will do at such a temperature, and such a body under such a pressure, so I may know (if I will only consider), how these great lords and gentlemen will certainly deal with such a matter as mine.

I have no right to be surprised, with a head upon my shoulders, and memory in it, that I fall into the ranks with all who came before me. I ought to have let it alone. I have had warning enough, I am sure.'

With that he put up his spectacle-case, and said to Arthur, 'If I don't complain, Mr Clennam, I can feel gratitude; and I assure you that I feel it towards our mutual friend. Many's the day, and many's the way in which he has backed me.'

'Stuff and nonsense,' said Mr Meagles.

Arthur could not but glance at Daniel Doyce in the ensuing silence.

Though it was evidently in the grain of his character, and of his respect for his own case, that he should abstain from idle murmuring, it was evident that he had grown the older, the sterner, and the poorer, for his long endeavour. He could not but think what a blessed thing it would have been for this man, if he had taken a lesson from the gentlemen who were so kind as to take a nation's affairs in charge, and had learnt How not to do it.

Mr Meagles was hot and despondent for about five minutes, and then began to cool and clear up.

'Come, come!' said he. 'We shall not make this the better by being grim. Where do you think of going, Dan?'

'I shall go back to the factory,' said Dan. 'Why then, we'll all go back to the factory, or walk in that direction,' returned Mr Meagles cheerfully. 'Mr Clennam won't be deterred by its being in Bleeding Heart Yard.'

'Bleeding Heart Yard?' said Clennam. 'I want to go there.'

'So much the better,' cried Mr Meagles. 'Come along!'

As they went along, certainly one of the party, and probably more than one, thought that Bleeding Heart Yard was no inappropriate destination for a man who had been in official correspondence with my lords and the Barnacles - and perhaps had a misgiving also that Britannia herself might come to look for lodgings in Bleeding Heart Yard some ugly day or other, if she over-did the Circumlocution Office.