Chapter XXIII - Machinery In Motion

Mr Meagles bestirred himself with such prompt activity in the matter of the negotiation with Daniel Doyce which Clennam had entrusted to him, that he soon brought it into business train, and called on Clennam at nine o'clock one morning to make his report. 'Doyce is highly gratified by your good opinion,' he opened the business by saying, 'and desires nothing so much as that you should examine the affairs of the Works for yourself, and entirely understand them. He has handed me the keys of all his books and papers - here they are jingling in this pocket - and the only charge he has given me is 'Let Mr Clennam have the means of putting himself on a perfect equality with me as to knowing whatever I know. If it should come to nothing after all, he will respect my confidence. Unless I was sure of that to begin with, I should have nothing to do with him.' And there, you see,' said Mr Meagles, 'you have Daniel Doyce all over.'

'A very honourable character.'

'Oh, yes, to be sure. Not a doubt of it. Odd, but very honourable. Very odd though. Now, would you believe, Clennam,' said Mr Meagles, with a hearty enjoyment of his friend's eccentricity, 'that I had a whole morning in What's-his-name Yard - '

'Bleeding Heart?'

'A whole morning in Bleeding Heart Yard, before I could induce him to pursue the subject at all?'

'How was that?'

'How was that, my friend? I no sooner mentioned your name in connection with it than he declared off.'

'Declared off on my account?'

'I no sooner mentioned your name, Clennam, than he said, 'That will never do!' What did he mean by that? I asked him. No matter, Meagles; that would never do. Why would it never do? You'll hardly believe it, Clennam,' said Mr Meagles, laughing within himself, 'but it came out that it would never do, because you and he, walking down to Twickenham together, had glided into a friendly conversation in the course of which he had referred to his intention of taking a partner, supposing at the time that you were as firmly and finally settled as St Paul's Cathedral. 'Whereas,' says he, 'Mr Clennam might now believe, if I entertained his proposition, that I had a sinister and designing motive in what was open free speech. Which I can't bear,' says he, 'which I really

am too proud to bear."

'I should as soon suspect - '

'Of course you would,' interrupted Mr Meagles, 'and so I told him. But it took a morning to scale that wall; and I doubt if any other man than myself (he likes me of old) could have got his leg over it. Well, Clennam. This business-like obstacle surmounted, he then stipulated that before resuming with you I should look over the books and form my own opinion. I looked over the books, and formed my own opinion. 'Is it, on the whole, for, or against?' says he. 'For,' says I. 'Then,' says he, 'you may now, my good friend, give Mr Clennam the means of forming his opinion. To enable him to do which, without bias and with perfect freedom, I shall go out of town for a week.' And he's gone,' said Mr Meagles; that's the rich conclusion of the thing.'

'Leaving me,' said Clennam, 'with a high sense, I must say, of his candour and his - '

'Oddity,' Mr Meagles struck in. 'I should think so!'

It was not exactly the word on Clennam's lips, but he forbore to interrupt his good-humoured friend.

'And now,' added Mr Meagles, 'you can begin to look into matters as soon as you think proper. I have undertaken to explain where you may want explanation, but to be strictly impartial, and to do nothing more.'

They began their perquisitions in Bleeding Heart Yard that same forenoon. Little peculiarities were easily to be detected by experienced eyes in Mr Doyce's way of managing his affairs, but they almost always involved some ingenious simplification of a difficulty, and some plain road to the desired end. That his papers were in arrear, and that he stood in need of assistance to develop the capacity of his business, was clear enough; but all the results of his undertakings during many years were distinctly set forth, and were ascertainable with ease. Nothing had been done for the purposes of the pending investigation; everything was in its genuine working dress, and in a certain honest rugged order. The calculations and entries, in his own hand, of which there were many, were bluntly written, and with no very neat precision; but were always plain and directed straight to the purpose. It occurred to Arthur that a far more elaborate and taking show of business - such as the records of the Circumlocution Office made perhaps - might be far less serviceable, as being meant to be far less intelligible.

Three or four days of steady application tendered him master of all the facts it was essential to become acquainted with. Mr Meagles was at hand the whole time, always ready to illuminate any dim place with the bright little safety-lamp belonging to the scales and scoop. Between them they agreed upon the sum it would be fair to offer for the purchase of a half-share in the business, and then Mr Meagles unsealed a paper in which Daniel Doyce had noted the amount at which he valued it; which was even something less. Thus, when Daniel came back, he found the affair as good as concluded.

'And I may now avow, Mr Clennam,' said he, with a cordial shake of the hand, 'that if I had looked high and low for a partner, I believe I could not have found one more to my mind.'

'I say the same,' said Clennam.

'And I say of both of you,' added Mr Meagles, 'that you are well matched. You keep him in check, Clennam, with your common sense, and you stick to the Works, Dan, with your - '

'Uncommon sense?' suggested Daniel, with his quiet smile.

'You may call it so, if you like - and each of you will be a right hand to the other. Here's my own right hand upon it, as a practical man, to both of you.'

The purchase was completed within a month. It left Arthur in possession of private personal means not exceeding a few hundred pounds; but it opened to him an active and promising career. The three friends dined together on the auspicious occasion; the factory and the factory wives and children made holiday and dined too; even Bleeding Heart Yard dined and was full of meat. Two months had barely gone by in all, when Bleeding Heart Yard had become so familiar with short-commons again, that the treat was forgotten there; when nothing seemed new in the partnership but the paint of the inscription on the door-posts, DOYCE AND CLENNAM; when it appeared even to Clennam himself, that he had had the affairs of the firm in his mind for years.

The little counting-house reserved for his own occupation, was a room of wood and glass at the end of a long low workshop, filled with benches, and vices, and tools, and straps, and wheels; which, when they were in gear with the steam-engine, went tearing round as though they had a suicidal mission to grind the business to dust and tear the factory to pieces. A communication of great trap- doors in the floor and roof with the workshop above and the workshop below, made a shaft of light in this perspective, which brought to Clennam's mind the child's old picture-book, where similar rays were the

witnesses of Abel's murder. The noises were sufficiently removed and shut out from the counting-house to blend into a busy hum, interspersed with periodical clinks and thumps. The patient figures at work were swarthy with the filings of iron and steel that danced on every bench and bubbled up through every chink in the planking. The workshop was arrived at by a step- ladder from the outer yard below, where it served as a shelter for the large grindstone where tools were sharpened. The whole had at once a fanciful and practical air in Clennam's eyes, which was a welcome change; and, as often as he raised them from his first work of getting the array of business documents into perfect order, he glanced at these things with a feeling of pleasure in his pursuit that was new to him.

Raising his eyes thus one day, he was surprised to see a bonnet labouring up the step-ladder. The unusual apparition was followed by another bonnet. He then perceived that the first bonnet was on the head of Mr F.'s Aunt, and that the second bonnet was on the head of Flora, who seemed to have propelled her legacy up the steep ascent with considerable difficulty. Though not altogether enraptured at the sight of these visitors, Clennam lost no time in opening the counting-house door, and extricating them from the workshop; a rescue which was rendered the more necessary by Mr F.'s Aunt already stumbling over some impediment, and menacing steam power as an Institution with a stony reticule she carried.

'Good gracious, Arthur, - I should say Mr Clennam, far more proper - the climb we have had to get up here and how ever to get down again without a fire-escape and Mr F.'s Aunt slipping through the steps and bruised all over and you in the machinery and foundry way too only think, and never told us!'

Thus, Flora, out of breath. Meanwhile, Mr F.'s Aunt rubbed her esteemed insteps with her umbrella, and vindictively glared.

'Most unkind never to have come back to see us since that day, though naturally it was not to be expected that there should be any attraction at our house and you were much more pleasantly engaged, that's pretty certain, and is she fair or dark blue eyes or black I wonder, not that I expect that she should be anything but a perfect contrast to me in all particulars for I am a disappointment as I very well know and you are quite right to be devoted no doubt though what I am saying Arthur never mind I hardly know myself Good gracious!'

By this time he had placed chairs for them in the counting-house. As Flora dropped into hers, she bestowed the old look upon him.

'And to think of Doyce and Clennam, and who Doyce can be,' said Flora; 'delightful man no doubt and married perhaps or perhaps a

daughter, now has he really? then one understands the partnership and sees it all, don't tell me anything about it for I know I have no claim to ask the question the golden chain that once was forged being snapped and very proper.'

Flora put her hand tenderly on his, and gave him another of the youthful glances.

'Dear Arthur - force of habit, Mr Clennam every way more delicate and adapted to existing circumstances - I must beg to be excused for taking the liberty of this intrusion but I thought I might so far presume upon old times for ever faded never more to bloom as to call with Mr F.'s Aunt to congratulate and offer best wishes, A great deal superior to China not to be denied and much nearer though higher up!'

'I am very happy to see you,' said Clennam, 'and I thank you, Flora, very much for your kind remembrance.' 'More than I can say myself at any rate,' returned Flora, 'for I might have been dead and buried twenty distinct times over and no doubt whatever should have been before you had genuinely remembered Me or anything like it in spite of which one last remark I wish to make, one last explanation I wish to offer - '

'My dear Mrs Finching,' Arthur remonstrated in alarm.

'Oh not that disagreeable name, say Flora!'

'Flora, is it worth troubling yourself afresh to enter into explanations? I assure you none are needed. I am satisfied - I am perfectly satisfied.'

A diversion was occasioned here, by Mr F.'s Aunt making the following inexorable and awful statement:

'There's mile-stones on the Dover road!'

With such mortal hostility towards the human race did she discharge this missile, that Clennam was quite at a loss how to defend himself; the rather as he had been already perplexed in his mind by the honour of a visit from this venerable lady, when it was plain she held him in the utmost abhorrence. He could not but look at her with disconcertment, as she sat breathing bitterness and scorn, and staring leagues away. Flora, however, received the remark as if it had been of a most apposite and agreeable nature; approvingly observing aloud that Mr F.'s Aunt had a great deal of spirit. Stimulated either by this compliment, or by her burning indignation, that illustrious woman then added, 'Let him meet it if he can!' And, with a rigid movement of her stony reticule (an appendage of great size and of a

fossil appearance), indicated that Clennam was the unfortunate person at whom the challenge was hurled.

'One last remark,' resumed Flora, 'I was going to say I wish to make one last explanation I wish to offer, Mr F.'s Aunt and myself would not have intruded on business hours Mr F. having been in business and though the wine trade still business is equally business call it what you will and business habits are just the same as witness Mr F. himself who had his slippers always on the mat at ten minutes before six in the afternoon and his boots inside the fender at ten minutes before eight in the morning to the moment in all weathers light or dark - would not therefore have intruded without a motive which being kindly meant it may be hoped will be kindly taken Arthur, Mr Clennam far more proper, even Doyce and Clennam probably more business-like.'

'Pray say nothing in the way of apology,' Arthur entreated. 'You are always welcome.'

'Very polite of you to say so Arthur - cannot remember Mr Clennam until the word is out, such is the habit of times for ever fled, and so true it is that oft in the stilly night ere slumber's chain has bound people, fond memory brings the light of other days around people - very polite but more polite than true I am afraid, for to go into the machinery business without so much as sending a line or a card to papa - I don't say me though there was a time but that is past and stern reality has now my gracious never mind - does not look like it you must confess.'

Even Flora's commas seemed to have fled on this occasion; she was so much more disjointed and voluble than in the preceding interview.

'Though indeed,' she hurried on, 'nothing else is to be expected and why should it be expected and if it's not to be expected why should it be, and I am far from blaming you or any one, When your mama and my papa worried us to death and severed the golden bowl - I mean bond but I dare say you know what I mean and if you don't you don't lose much and care just as little I will venture to add - when they severed the golden bond that bound us and threw us into fits of crying on the sofa nearly choked at least myself everything was changed and in giving my hand to Mr F. I know I did so with my eyes open but he was so very unsettled and in such low spirits that he had distractedly alluded to the river if not oil of something from the chemist's and I did it for the best.'

'My good Flora, we settled that before. It was all quite right.'

'It's perfectly clear you think so,' returned Flora, 'for you take it very coolly, if I hadn't known it to be China I should have guessed myself the Polar regions, dear Mr Clennam you are right however and I cannot blame you but as to Doyce and Clennam papa's property being about here we heard it from Pancks and but for him we never should have heard one word about it I am satisfied.'

'No, no, don't say that.'

'What nonsense not to say it Arthur - Doyce and Clennam - easier and less trying to me than Mr Clennam - when I know it and you know it too and can't deny it.'

'But I do deny it, Flora. I should soon have made you a friendly visit.'

'Ah!' said Flora, tossing her head. 'I dare say!' and she gave him another of the old looks. 'However when Pancks told us I made up my mind that Mr F.'s Aunt and I would come and call because when papa - which was before that - happened to mention her name to me and to say that you were interested in her I said at the moment Good gracious why not have her here then when there's anything to do instead of putting it out.'

'When you say Her,' observed Clennam, by this time pretty well bewildered, 'do you mean Mr F.'s - '

'My goodness, Arthur - Doyce and Clennam really easier to me with old remembrances - who ever heard of Mr F.'s Aunt doing needlework and going out by the day?'

'Going out by the day! Do you speak of Little Dorrit?' 'Why yes of course,' returned Flora; 'and of all the strangest names I ever heard the strangest, like a place down in the country with a turnpike, or a favourite pony or a puppy or a bird or something from a seed-shop to be put in a garden or a flower-pot and come up speckled.'

'Then, Flora,' said Arthur, with a sudden interest in the conversation, 'Mr Casby was so kind as to mention Little Dorrit to you, was he? What did he say?'

'Oh you know what papa is,' rejoined Flora, 'and how aggravatingly he sits looking beautiful and turning his thumbs over and over one another till he makes one giddy if one keeps one's eyes upon him, he said when we were talking of you - I don't know who began the subject Arthur (Doyce and Clennam) but I am sure it wasn't me, at least I hope not but you really must excuse my confessing more on that point.'

'Certainly,' said Arthur. 'By all means.'

'You are very ready,' pouted Flora, coming to a sudden stop in a captivating bashfulness, 'that I must admit, Papa said you had spoken of her in an earnest way and I said what I have told you and that's all.'

'That's all?' said Arthur, a little disappointed.

'Except that when Pancks told us of your having embarked in this business and with difficulty persuaded us that it was really you I said to Mr F.'s Aunt then we would come and ask you if it would be agreeable to all parties that she should be engaged at our house when required for I know she often goes to your mama's and I know that your mama has a very touchy temper Arthur - Doyce and Clennam - or I never might have married Mr F. and might have been at this hour but I am running into nonsense.'

'It was very kind of you, Flora, to think of this.'

Poor Flora rejoined with a plain sincerity which became her better than her youngest glances, that she was glad he thought so. She said it with so much heart that Clennam would have given a great deal to buy his old character of her on the spot, and throw it and the mermaid away for ever.

'I think, Flora,' he said, 'that the employment you can give Little Dorrit, and the kindness you can show her - '

'Yes and I will,' said Flora, quickly.

'I am sure of it - will be a great assistance and support to her. I do not feel that I have the right to tell you what I know of her, for I acquired the knowledge confidentially, and under circumstances that bind me to silence. But I have an interest in the little creature, and a respect for her that I cannot express to you. Her life has been one of such trial and devotion, and such quiet goodness, as you can scarcely imagine. I can hardly think of her, far less speak of her, without feeling moved. Let that feeling represent what I could tell you, and commit her to your friendliness with my thanks.'

Once more he put out his hand frankly to poor Flora; once more poor Flora couldn't accept it frankly, found it worth nothing openly, must make the old intrigue and mystery of it. As much to her own enjoyment as to his dismay, she covered it with a corner of her shawl as she took it. Then, looking towards the glass front of the counting-house, and seeing two figures approaching, she cried with infinite relish, 'Papa! Hush, Arthur, for Mercy's sake!' and tottered back to her

chair with an amazing imitation of being in danger of swooning, in the dread surprise and maidenly flutter of her spirits.

The Patriarch, meanwhile, came inanely beaming towards the counting-house in the wake of Pancks. Pancks opened the door for him, towed him in, and retired to his own moorings in a corner.

'I heard from Flora,' said the Patriarch with his benevolent smile, 'that she was coming to call, coming to call. And being out, I thought I'd come also, thought I'd come also.'

The benign wisdom he infused into this declaration (not of itself profound), by means of his blue eyes, his shining head, and his long white hair, was most impressive. It seemed worth putting down among the noblest sentiments enunciated by the best of men. Also, when he said to Clennam, seating himself in the proffered chair, 'And you are in a new business, Mr Clennam? I wish you well, sir, I wish you well!' he seemed to have done benevolent wonders.

'Mrs Finching has been telling me, sir,' said Arthur, after making his acknowledgments; the relict of the late Mr F. meanwhile protesting, with a gesture, against his use of that respectable name; 'that she hopes occasionally to employ the young needlewoman you recommended to my mother. For which I have been thanking her.'

The Patriarch turning his head in a lumbering way towards Pancks, that assistant put up the note-book in which he had been absorbed, and took him in tow.

'You didn't recommend her, you know,' said Pancks; 'how could you? You knew nothing about her, you didn't. The name was mentioned to you, and you passed it on. That's what YOU did.'

'Well!' said Clennam. 'As she justifies any recommendation, it is much the same thing.'

'You are glad she turns out well,' said Pancks, 'but it wouldn't have been your fault if she had turned out ill. The credit's not yours as it is, and the blame wouldn't have been yours as it might have been. You gave no guarantee. You knew nothing about her.' 'You are not acquainted, then,' said Arthur, hazarding a random question, 'with any of her family?'

'Acquainted with any of her family?' returned Pancks. 'How should you be acquainted with any of her family? You never heard of 'em. You can't be acquainted with people you never heard of, can you? You should think not!'

All this time the Patriarch sat serenely smiling; nodding or shaking his head benevolently, as the case required.

'As to being a reference,' said Pancks, 'you know, in a general way, what being a reference means. It's all your eye, that is! Look at your tenants down the Yard here. They'd all be references for one another, if you'd let 'em. What would be the good of letting 'em? It's no satisfaction to be done by two men instead of one. One's enough. A person who can't pay, gets another person who can't pay, to guarantee that he can pay. Like a person with two wooden legs getting another person with two wooden legs, to guarantee that he has got two natural legs. It don't make either of them able to do a walking match. And four wooden legs are more troublesome to you than two, when you don't want any.' Mr Pancks concluded by blowing off that steam of his.

A momentary silence that ensued was broken by Mr F.'s Aunt, who had been sitting upright in a cataleptic state since her last public remark. She now underwent a violent twitch, calculated to produce a startling effect on the nerves of the uninitiated, and with the deadliest animosity observed:

'You can't make a head and brains out of a brass knob with nothing in it. You couldn't do it when your Uncle George was living; much less when he's dead.'

Mr Pancks was not slow to reply, with his usual calmness, 'Indeed, ma'am! Bless my soul! I'm surprised to hear it.' Despite his presence of mind, however, the speech of Mr F.'s Aunt produced a depressing effect on the little assembly; firstly, because it was impossible to disguise that Clennam's unoffending head was the particular temple of reason depreciated; and secondly, because nobody ever knew on these occasions whose Uncle George was referred to, or what spectral presence might be invoked under that appellation.

Therefore Flora said, though still not without a certain boastfulness and triumph in her legacy, that Mr F.'s Aunt was 'very lively to-day, and she thought they had better go.' But Mr F.'s Aunt proved so lively as to take the suggestion in unexpected dudgeon and declare that she would not go; adding, with several injurious expressions, that if 'He' - too evidently meaning Clennam - wanted to get rid of her, 'let him chuck her out of winder;' and urgently expressing her desire to see 'Him' perform that ceremony.

In this dilemma, Mr Pancks, whose resources appeared equal to any emergency in the Patriarchal waters, slipped on his hat, slipped out at the counting-house door, and slipped in again a moment afterwards with an artificial freshness upon him, as if he had been in the country

for some weeks. 'Why, bless my heart, ma'am!' said Mr Pancks, rubbing up his hair in great astonishment, 'is that you?

How do you do, ma'am? You are looking charming to-day! I am delighted to see you. Favour me with your arm, ma'am; we'll have a little walk together, you and me, if you'll honour me with your company.' And so escorted Mr F.'s Aunt down the private staircase of the counting-house with great gallantry and success. The patriarchal Mr Casby then rose with the air of having done it himself, and blandly followed: leaving his daughter, as she followed in her turn, to remark to her former lover in a distracted whisper (which she very much enjoyed), that they had drained the cup of life to the dregs; and further to hint mysteriously that the late Mr F. was at the bottom of it.

Alone again, Clennam became a prey to his old doubts in reference to his mother and Little Dorrit, and revolved the old thoughts and suspicions. They were all in his mind, blending themselves with the duties he was mechanically discharging, when a shadow on his papers caused him to look up for the cause. The cause was Mr Pancks. With his hat thrown back upon his ears as if his wiry prongs of hair had darted up like springs and cast it off, with his jet-black beads of eyes inquisitively sharp, with the fingers of his right hand in his mouth that he might bite the nails, and with the fingers of his left hand in reserve in his pocket for another course, Mr Pancks cast his shadow through the glass upon the books and papers.

Mr Pancks asked, with a little inquiring twist of his head, if he might come in again? Clennam replied with a nod of his head in the affirmative. Mr Pancks worked his way in, came alongside the desk, made himself fast by leaning his arms upon it, and started conversation with a puff and a snort.

'Mr F.'s Aunt is appeased, I hope?' said Clennam.

'All right, sir,' said Pancks.

'I am so unfortunate as to have awakened a strong animosity in the breast of that lady,' said Clennam. 'Do you know why?'

'Does SHE know why?' said Pancks.

'I suppose not.'

'*I* suppose not,' said Pancks.

He took out his note-book, opened it, shut it, dropped it into his hat, which was beside him on the desk, and looked in at it as it lay at the bottom of the hat: all with a great appearance of consideration.

'Mr Clennam,' he then began, 'I am in want of information, sir.'

'Connected with this firm?' asked Clennam.

'No,' said Pancks.

'With what then, Mr Pancks? That is to say, assuming that you want it of me.'

'Yes, sir; yes, I want it of you,' said Pancks, 'if I can persuade you to furnish it. A, B, C, D. DA, DE, DI, DO. Dictionary order.

Dorrit. That's the name, sir?'

Mr Pancks blew off his peculiar noise again, and fell to at his right-hand nails. Arthur looked searchingly at him; he returned the look.

'I don't understand you, Mr Pancks.'

'That's the name that I want to know about.'

'And what do you want to know?'

'Whatever you can and will tell me.' This comprehensive summary of his desires was not discharged without some heavy labouring on the part of Mr Pancks's machinery.

'This is a singular visit, Mr Pancks. It strikes me as rather extraordinary that you should come, with such an object, to me.'

'It may be all extraordinary together,' returned Pancks. 'It may be out of the ordinary course, and yet be business. In short, it is business. I am a man of business. What business have I in this present world, except to stick to business? No business.'

With his former doubt whether this dry hard personage were quite in earnest, Clennam again turned his eyes attentively upon his face. It was as scrubby and dingy as ever, and as eager and quick as ever, and he could see nothing lurking in it that was at all expressive of a latent mockery that had seemed to strike upon his ear in the voice.

'Now,' said Pancks, 'to put this business on its own footing, it's not my proprietor's.'

'Do you refer to Mr Casby as your proprietor?'

Pancks nodded. 'My proprietor. Put a case. Say, at my proprietor's I hear name - name of young person Mr Clennam wants to serve. Say,

name first mentioned to my proprietor by Plornish in the Yard. Say, I go to Plornish. Say, I ask Plornish as a matter of business for information. Say, Plornish, though six weeks in arrear to my proprietor, declines. Say, Mrs Plornish declines. Say, both refer to Mr Clennam. Put the case.' 'Well?'

'Well, sir,' returned Pancks, 'say, I come to him. Say, here I am.'

With those prongs of hair sticking up all over his head, and his breath coming and going very hard and short, the busy Pancks fell back a step (in Tug metaphor, took half a turn astern) as if to show his dingy hull complete, then forged a-head again, and directed his quick glance by turns into his hat where his note-book was, and into Clennam's face.

'Mr Pancks, not to trespass on your grounds of mystery, I will be as plain with you as I can. Let me ask two questions. First - '

'All right!' said Pancks, holding up his dirty forefinger with his broken nail. 'I see! "What's your motive?"

'Exactly.'

'Motive,' said Pancks, 'good. Nothing to do with my proprietor; not stateable at present, ridiculous to state at present; but good.

Desiring to serve young person, name of Dorrit,' said Pancks, with his forefinger still up as a caution. 'Better admit motive to be good.'

'Secondly, and lastly, what do you want to know?'

Mr Pancks fished up his note-book before the question was put, and buttoning it with care in an inner breast-pocket, and looking straight at Clennam all the time, replied with a pause and a puff, 'I want supplementary information of any sort.'

Clennam could not withhold a smile, as the panting little steam- tug, so useful to that unwieldy ship, the Casby, waited on and watched him as if it were seeking an opportunity of running in and rifling him of all he wanted before he could resist its manoeuvres; though there was that in Mr Pancks's eagerness, too, which awakened many wondering speculations in his mind. After a little consideration, he resolved to supply Mr Pancks with such leading information as it was in his power to impart him; well knowing that Mr Pancks, if he failed in his present research, was pretty sure to find other means of getting it.

He, therefore, first requesting Mr Pancks to remember his voluntary declaration that his proprietor had no part in the disclosure, and that his own intentions were good (two declarations which that coaly little gentleman with the greatest ardour repeated), openly told him that as to the Dorrit lineage or former place of habitation, he had no information to communicate, and that his knowledge of the family did not extend beyond the fact that it appeared to be now reduced to five members; namely, to two brothers, of whom one was single, and one a widower with three children. The ages of the whole family he made known to Mr Pancks, as nearly as he could guess at them; and finally he described to him the position of the Father of the Marshalsea, and the course of time and events through which he had become invested with that character. To all this, Mr Pancks, snorting and blowing in a more and more portentous manner as he became more interested, listened with great attention; appearing to derive the most agreeable sensations from the painfullest parts of the narrative, and particularly to be quite charmed by the account of William Dorrit's long imprisonment.

'In conclusion, Mr Pancks,' said Arthur, 'I have but to say this. I have reasons beyond a personal regard for speaking as little as I can of the Dorrit family, particularly at my mother's house' (Mr Pancks nodded), 'and for knowing as much as I can. So devoted a man of business as you are - eh?'

For Mr Pancks had suddenly made that blowing effort with unusual force.

'It's nothing,' said Pancks.

'So devoted a man of business as yourself has a perfect understanding of a fair bargain. I wish to make a fair bargain with you, that you shall enlighten me concerning the Dorrit family when you have it in your power, as I have enlightened you. It may not give you a very flattering idea of my business habits, that I failed to make my terms beforehand,' continued Clennam; 'but I prefer to make them a point of honour. I have seen so much business done on sharp principles that, to tell you the truth, Mr Pancks, I am tired of them.'

Mr Pancks laughed. 'It's a bargain, sir,' said he. 'You shall find me stick to it.'

After that, he stood a little while looking at Clennam, and biting his ten nails all round; evidently while he fixed in his mind what he had been told, and went over it carefully, before the means of supplying a gap in his memory should be no longer at hand. 'It's all right,' he said at last, 'and now I'll wish you good day, as it's collecting day in the Yard. By-the-bye, though. A lame foreigner with a stick.'

'Ay, ay. You do take a reference sometimes, I see?' said Clennam.

'When he can pay, sir,' replied Pancks. 'Take all you can get, and keep back all you can't be forced to give up. That's business. The lame foreigner with the stick wants a top room down the Yard. Is he good for it?'

'I am,' said Clennam, 'and I will answer for him.'

'That's enough. What I must have of Bleeding Heart Yard,' said Pancks, making a note of the case in his book, 'is my bond. I want my bond, you see. Pay up, or produce your property! That's the watchword down the Yard. The lame foreigner with the stick represented that you sent him; but he could represent (as far as that goes) that the Great Mogul sent him. He has been in the hospital, I believe?'

'Yes. Through having met with an accident. He is only just now discharged.'

'It's pauperising a man, sir, I have been shown, to let him into a hospital?' said Pancks. And again blew off that remarkable sound.

'I have been shown so too,' said Clennam, coldly.

Mr Pancks, being by that time quite ready for a start, got under steam in a moment, and, without any other signal or ceremony, was snorting down the step-ladder and working into Bleeding Heart Yard, before he seemed to be well out of the counting-house.

Throughout the remainder of the day, Bleeding Heart Yard was in consternation, as the grim Pancks cruised in it; haranguing the inhabitants on their backslidings in respect of payment, demanding his bond, breathing notices to quit and executions, running down defaulters, sending a swell of terror on before him, and leaving it in his wake. Knots of people, impelled by a fatal attraction, lurked outside any house in which he was known to be, listening for fragments of his discourses to the inmates; and, when he was rumoured to be coming down the stairs, often could not disperse so quickly but that he would be prematurely in among them, demanding their own arrears, and rooting them to the spot. Throughout the remainder of the day, Mr Pancks's What were they up to? and What did they mean by it? sounded all over the Yard. Mr Pancks wouldn't hear of excuses, wouldn't hear of complaints, wouldn't hear of repairs, wouldn't hear of anything but unconditional money down. Perspiring and puffing and darting about in eccentric directions, and becoming hotter and dingier every moment, he lashed the tide of the yard into a most agitated and turbid state. It had not settled down into calm

water again full two hours after he had been seen fuming away on the horizon at the top of the steps.

There were several small assemblages of the Bleeding Hearts at the popular points of meeting in the Yard that night, among whom it was universally agreed that Mr Pancks was a hard man to have to do with; and that it was much to be regretted, so it was, that a gentleman like Mr Casby should put his rents in his hands, and never know him in his true light. For (said the Bleeding Hearts), if a gentleman with that head of hair and them eyes took his rents into his own hands, ma'am, there would be none of this worriting and wearing, and things would be very different.

At which identical evening hour and minute, the Patriarch - who had floated serenely through the Yard in the forenoon before the harrying began, with the express design of getting up this trustfulness in his shining bumps and silken locks - at which identical hour and minute, that first-rate humbug of a thousand guns was heavily floundering in the little Dock of his exhausted Tug at home, and was saying, as he turned his thumbs:

'A very bad day's work, Pancks, very bad day's work. It seems to me, sir, and I must insist on making this observation forcibly in justice to myself, that you ought to have got much more money, much more money.'