Chapter XXXI - Spirit

Anybody may pass, any day, in the thronged thoroughfares of the metropolis, some meagre, wrinkled, yellow old man (who might be supposed to have dropped from the stars, if there were any star in the Heavens dull enough to be suspected of casting off so feeble a spark), creeping along with a scared air, as though bewildered and a little frightened by the noise and bustle. This old man is always a little old man. If he were ever a big old man, he has shrunk into a little old man; if he were always a little old man, he has dwindled into a less old man. His coat is a colour, and cut, that never was the mode anywhere, at any period. Clearly, it was not made for him, or for any individual mortal. Some wholesale contractor measured Fate for five thousand coats of such quality, and Fate has lent this old coat to this old man, as one of a long unfinished line of many old men. It has always large dull metal buttons, similar to no other buttons. This old man wears a hat, a thumbed and napless and yet an obdurate hat, which has never adapted itself to the shape of his poor head. His coarse shirt and his coarse neckcloth have no more individuality than his coat and hat; they have the same character of not being his - of not being anybody's. Yet this old man wears these clothes with a certain unaccustomed air of being dressed and elaborated for the public ways; as though he passed the greater part of his time in a nightcap and gown. And so, like the country mouse in the second year of a famine, come to see the town mouse, and timidly threading his way to the town-mouse's lodging through a city of cats, this old man passes in the streets.

Sometimes, on holidays towards evening, he will be seen to walk with a slightly increased infirmity, and his old eyes will glimmer with a moist and marshy light. Then the little old man is drunk. A very small measure will overset him; he may be bowled off his unsteady legs with a half-pint pot. Some pitying acquaintance - chance acquaintance very often - has warmed up his weakness with a treat of beer, and the consequence will be the lapse of a longer time than usual before he shall pass again. For the little old man is going home to the Workhouse; and on his good behaviour they do not let him out often (though methinks they might, considering the few years he has before him to go out in, under the sun); and on his bad behaviour they shut him up closer than ever in a grove of two score and nineteen more old men, every one of whom smells of all the others.

Mrs Plornish's father, - a poor little reedy piping old gentleman, like a worn-out bird; who had been in what he called the music- binding business, and met with great misfortunes, and who had seldom been able to make his way, or to see it or to pay it, or to do anything at all with it but find it no thoroughfare, - had retired of his own accord to the Workhouse which was appointed by law to be the Good Samaritan

of his district (without the twopence, which was bad political economy), on the settlement of that execution which had carried Mr Plornish to the Marshalsea College. Previous to his son-in-law's difficulties coming to that head, Old Nandy (he was always so called in his legal Retreat, but he was Old Mr Nandy among the Bleeding Hearts) had sat in a corner of the Plornish fireside, and taken his bite and sup out of the Plornish cupboard. He still hoped to resume that domestic position when Fortune should smile upon his son-in-law; in the meantime, while she preserved an immovable countenance, he was, and resolved to remain, one of these little old men in a grove of little old men with a community of flavour.

But no poverty in him, and no coat on him that never was the mode, and no Old Men's Ward for his dwelling-place, could quench his daughter's admiration. Mrs Plornish was as proud of her father's talents as she could possibly have been if they had made him Lord Chancellor. She had as firm a belief in the sweetness and propriety of his manners as she could possibly have had if he had been Lord Chamberlain. The poor little old man knew some pale and vapid little songs, long out of date, about Chloe, and Phyllis, and Strephon being wounded by the son of Venus; and for Mrs Plornish there was no such music at the Opera as the small internal flutterings and chirpings wherein he would discharge himself of these ditties, like a weak, little, broken barrel-organ, ground by a baby. On his 'days out,' those flecks of light in his flat vista of pollard old men,' it was at once Mrs Plornish's delight and sorrow, when he was strong with meat, and had taken his full halfpenny-worth of porter, to say, 'Sing us a song, Father.' Then he would give them Chloe, and if he were in pretty good spirits, Phyllis also - Strephon he had hardly been up to since he went into retirement - and then would Mrs Plornish declare she did believe there never was such a singer as Father, and wipe her eyes.

If he had come from Court on these occasions, nay, if he had been the noble Refrigerator come home triumphantly from a foreign court to be presented and promoted on his last tremendous failure, Mrs Plornish could not have handed him with greater elevation about Bleeding Heart Yard. 'Here's Father,' she would say, presenting him to a neighbour. 'Father will soon be home with us for good, now. Ain't Father looking well? Father's a sweeter singer than ever; you'd never have forgotten it, if you'd aheard him just now.'

As to Mr Plornish, he had married these articles of belief in marrying Mr Nandy's daughter, and only wondered how it was that so gifted an old gentleman had not made a fortune. This he attributed, after much reflection, to his musical genius not having been scientifically developed in his youth. 'For why,' argued Mr Plornish, 'why go a-binding music when you've got it in yourself? That's where it is, I consider.'

Old Nandy had a patron: one patron. He had a patron who in a certain sumptuous way - an apologetic way, as if he constantly took an admiring audience to witness that he really could not help being more free with this old fellow than they might have expected, on account of his simplicity and poverty - was mightily good to him. Old Nandy had been several times to the Marshalsea College, communicating with his son-in-law during his short durance there; and had happily acquired to himself, and had by degrees and in course of time much improved, the patronage of the Father of that national institution.

Mr Dorrit was in the habit of receiving this old man as if the old man held of him in vassalage under some feudal tenure. He made little treats and teas for him, as if he came in with his homage from some outlying district where the tenantry were in a primitive state.

It seemed as if there were moments when he could by no means have sworn but that the old man was an ancient retainer of his, who had been meritoriously faithful. When he mentioned him, he spoke of him casually as his old pensioner. He had a wonderful satisfaction in seeing him, and in commenting on his decayed condition after he was gone. It appeared to him amazing that he could hold up his head at all, poor creature. 'In the Workhouse, sir, the Union; no privacy, no visitors, no station, no respect, no speciality. Most deplorable!'

It was Old Nandy's birthday, and they let him out. He said nothing about its being his birthday, or they might have kept him in; for such old men should not be born. He passed along the streets as usual to Bleeding Heart Yard, and had his dinner with his daughter and son-in-law, and gave them Phyllis. He had hardly concluded, when Little Dorrit looked in to see how they all were.

'Miss Dorrit,' said Mrs Plornish, 'here's Father! Ain't he looking nice? And such voice he's in!'

Little Dorrit gave him her hand, and smilingly said she had not seen him this long time.

'No, they're rather hard on poor Father,' said Mrs Plornish with a lengthening face, 'and don't let him have half as much change and fresh air as would benefit him. But he'll soon be home for good, now. Won't you, Father?'

'Yes, my dear, I hope so. In good time, please God.'

Here Mr Plornish delivered himself of an oration which he invariably made, word for word the same, on all such opportunities.

It was couched in the following terms:

'John Edward Nandy. Sir. While there's a ounce of wittles or drink of any sort in this present roof, you're fully welcome to your share on it. While there's a handful of fire or a mouthful of bed in this present roof, you're fully welcome to your share on it.

If so be as there should be nothing in this present roof, you should be as welcome to your share on it as if it was something, much or little. And this is what I mean and so I don't deceive you, and consequently which is to stand out is to entreat of you, and therefore why not do it?'

To this lucid address, which Mr Plornish always delivered as if he had composed it (as no doubt he had) with enormous labour, Mrs Plornish's father pipingly replied:

'I thank you kindly, Thomas, and I know your intentions well, which is the same I thank you kindly for. But no, Thomas. Until such times as it's not to take it out of your children's mouths, which take it is, and call it by what name you will it do remain and equally deprive, though may they come, and too soon they can not come, no Thomas, no!'

Mrs Plornish, who had been turning her face a little away with a corner of her apron in her hand, brought herself back to the conversation again by telling Miss Dorrit that Father was going over the water to pay his respects, unless she knew of any reason why it might not be agreeable.

Her answer was, 'I am going straight home, and if he will come with me I shall be so glad to take care of him - so glad,' said Little Dorrit, always thoughtful of the feelings of the weak, 'of his company.'

'There, Father!' cried Mrs Plornish. 'Ain't you a gay young man to be going for a walk along with Miss Dorrit! Let me tie your neck-handkerchief into a regular good bow, for you're a regular beau yourself, Father, if ever there was one.'

With this filial joke his daughter smartened him up, and gave him a loving hug, and stood at the door with her weak child in her arms, and her strong child tumbling down the steps, looking after her little old father as he toddled away with his arm under Little Dorrit's.

They walked at a slow pace, and Little Dorrit took him by the Iron Bridge and sat him down there for a rest, and they looked over at the water and talked about the shipping, and the old man mentioned what he would do if he had a ship full of gold coming home to him (his plan was to take a noble lodging for the Plornishes and himself at a Tea Gardens, and live there all the rest of their lives, attended on by the waiter), and it was a special birthday of the old man. They were within five minutes of their destination, when, at the corner of her

own street, they came upon Fanny in her new bonnet bound for the same port.

'Why, good gracious me, Amy!' cried that young lady starting. 'You never mean it!'

'Mean what, Fanny dear?'

'Well! I could have believed a great deal of you,' returned the young lady with burning indignation, 'but I don't think even I could have believed this, of even you!'

'Fanny!' cried Little Dorrit, wounded and astonished.

'Oh! Don't Fanny me, you mean little thing, don't! The idea of coming along the open streets, in the broad light of day, with a Pauper!' (firing off the last word as if it were a ball from an air-gun). 'O Fanny!'

'I tell you not to Fanny me, for I'll not submit to it! I never knew such a thing. The way in which you are resolved and determined to disgrace us on all occasions, is really infamous. You bad little thing!'

'Does it disgrace anybody,' said Little Dorrit, very gently, 'to take care of this poor old man?'

'Yes, miss,' returned her sister, 'and you ought to know it does. And you do know it does, and you do it because you know it does. The principal pleasure of your life is to remind your family of their misfortunes. And the next great pleasure of your existence is to keep low company. But, however, if you have no sense of decency, I have. You'll please to allow me to go on the other side of the way, unmolested.'

With this, she bounced across to the opposite pavement. The old disgrace, who had been deferentially bowing a pace or two off (for Little Dorrit had let his arm go in her wonder, when Fanny began), and who had been hustled and cursed by impatient passengers for stopping the way, rejoined his companion, rather giddy, and said, 'I hope nothing's wrong with your honoured father, Miss? I hope there's nothing the matter in the honoured family?'

'No, no,' returned Little Dorrit. 'No, thank you. Give me your arm again, Mr Nandy. We shall soon be there now.'

So she talked to him as she had talked before, and they came to the Lodge and found Mr Chivery on the lock, and went in. Now, it happened that the Father of the Marshalsea was sauntering towards the Lodge at the moment when they were coming out of it, entering

the prison arm in arm. As the spectacle of their approach met his view, he displayed the utmost agitation and despondency of mind; and - altogether regardless of Old Nandy, who, making his reverence, stood with his hat in his hand, as he always did in that gracious presence - turned about, and hurried in at his own doorway and up the staircase.

Leaving the old unfortunate, whom in an evil hour she had taken under her protection, with a hurried promise to return to him directly, Little Dorrit hastened after her father, and, on the staircase, found Fanny following her, and flouncing up with offended dignity. The three came into the room almost together; and the Father sat down in his chair, buried his face in his hands, and uttered a groan.

'Of course,' said Fanny. 'Very proper. Poor, afflicted Pa! Now, I hope you believe me, Miss?'

'What is it, father?' cried Little Dorrit, bending over him. 'Have I made you unhappy, father? Not I, I hope!'

'You hope, indeed! I dare say! Oh, you' - Fanny paused for a sufficiently strong expression - 'you Common-minded little Amy! You complete prison-child!'

He stopped these angry reproaches with a wave of his hand, and sobbed out, raising his face and shaking his melancholy head at his younger daughter, 'Amy, I know that you are innocent in intention. But you have cut me to the soul.' 'Innocent in intention!' the implacable Fanny struck in. 'Stuff in intention! Low in intention! Lowering of the family in intention!'

'Father!' cried Little Dorrit, pale and trembling. 'I am very sorry. Pray forgive me. Tell me how it is, that I may not do it again!'

'How it is, you prevaricating little piece of goods!' cried Fanny. 'You know how it is. I have told you already, so don't fly in the face of Providence by attempting to deny it!'

'Hush! Amy,' said the father, passing his pocket-handkerchief several times across his face, and then grasping it convulsively in the hand that dropped across his knee, 'I have done what I could to keep you select here; I have done what I could to retain you a position here. I may have succeeded; I may not. You may know it; you may not. I give no opinion. I have endured everything here but humiliation. That I have happily been spared - until this day.'

Here his convulsive grasp unclosed itself, and he put his pocket-handkerchief to his eyes again. Little Dorrit, on the ground beside

him, with her imploring hand upon his arm, watched him remorsefully. Coming out of his fit of grief, he clenched his pocket-handkerchief once more.

'Humiliation I have happily been spared until this day. Through all my troubles there has been that - Spirit in myself, and that - that submission to it, if I may use the term, in those about me, which has spared me - ha - humiliation. But this day, this minute, I have keenly felt it.'

'Of course! How could it be otherwise?' exclaimed the irrepressible Fanny. 'Careering and prancing about with a Pauper!' (air-gun again).

'But, dear father,' cried Little Dorrit, 'I don't justify myself for having wounded your dear heart - no! Heaven knows I don't!' She clasped her hands in quite an agony of distress. 'I do nothing but beg and pray you to be comforted and overlook it. But if I had not known that you were kind to the old man yourself, and took much notice of him, and were always glad to see him, I would not have come here with him, father, I would not, indeed. What I have been so unhappy as to do, I have done in mistake. I would not wilfully bring a tear to your eyes, dear love!' said Little Dorrit, her heart well-nigh broken, 'for anything the world could give me, or anything it could take away.'

Fanny, with a partly angry and partly repentant sob, began to cry herself, and to say - as this young lady always said when she was half in passion and half out of it, half spiteful with herself and half spiteful with everybody else - that she wished she were dead.

The Father of the Marshalsea in the meantime took his younger daughter to his breast, and patted her head. 'There, there! Say no more, Amy, say no more, my child. I will forget it as soon as I can. I,' with hysterical cheerfulness, 'I - shall soon be able to dismiss it. It is perfectly true, my dear, that I am always glad to see my old pensioner - as such, as such - and that I do - ha - extend as much protection and kindness to the - hum - the bruised reed - I trust I may so call him without impropriety - as in my circumstances, I can. It is quite true that this is the case, my dear child. At the same time, I preserve in doing this, if I may - ha - if I may use the expression - Spirit. Becoming Spirit. And there are some things which are,' he stopped to sob, 'irreconcilable with that, and wound that - wound it deeply.

It is not that I have seen my good Amy attentive, and - ha - condescending to my old pensioner - it is not that that hurts me. It is, if I am to close the painful subject by being explicit, that I have seen my child, my own child, my own daughter, coming into this College out of the public streets - smiling! smiling! - arm in arm with - O my God, a livery!'

This reference to the coat of no cut and no time, the unfortunate gentleman gasped forth, in a scarcely audible voice, and with his clenched pocket-handkerchief raised in the air. His excited feelings might have found some further painful utterance, but for a knock at the door, which had been already twice repeated, and to which Fanny (still wishing herself dead, and indeed now going so far as to add, buried) cried 'Come in!'

'Ah, Young John!' said the Father, in an altered and calmed voice. 'What is it, Young John?'

'A letter for you, sir, being left in the Lodge just this minute, and a message with it, I thought, happening to be there myself, sir, I would bring it to your room.' The speaker's attention was much distracted by the piteous spectacle of Little Dorrit at her father's feet, with her head turned away.

'Indeed, John? Thank you.'

'The letter is from Mr Clennam, sir - it's the answer - and the message was, sir, that Mr Clennam also sent his compliments, and word that he would do himself the pleasure of calling this afternoon, hoping to see you, and likewise,' attention more distracted than before, 'Miss Amy.'

'Oh!' As the Father glanced into the letter (there was a bank-note in it), he reddened a little, and patted Amy on the head afresh. 'Thank you, Young John. Quite right. Much obliged to you for your attention. No one waiting?'

'No, sir, no one waiting.'

'Thank you, John. How is your mother, Young John?'

'Thank you, sir, she's not quite as well as we could wish - in fact, we none of us are, except father - but she's pretty well, sir.' 'Say we sent our remembrances, will you? Say kind remembrances, if you please, Young John.'

'Thank you, sir, I will.' And Mr Chivery junior went his way, having spontaneously composed on the spot an entirely new epitaph for himself, to the effect that Here lay the body of John Chivery, Who, Having at such a date, Beheld the idol of his life, In grief and tears, And feeling unable to bear the harrowing spectacle, Immediately repaired to the abode of his inconsolable parents, And terminated his existence by his own rash act.

'There, there, Amy!' said the Father, when Young John had closed the door, 'let us say no more about it.' The last few minutes had improved his spirits remarkably, and he was quite lightsome. 'Where is my old pensioner all this while? We must not leave him by himself any longer, or he will begin to suppose he is not welcome, and that would pain me. Will you fetch him, my child, or shall I?'

'If you wouldn't mind, father,' said Little Dorrit, trying to bring her sobbing to a close.

'Certainly I will go, my dear. I forgot; your eyes are rather red.

There! Cheer up, Amy. Don't be uneasy about me. I am quite myself again, my love, quite myself. Go to your room, Amy, and make yourself look comfortable and pleasant to receive Mr Clennam.'

'I would rather stay in my own room, Father,' returned Little Dorrit, finding it more difficult than before to regain her composure. 'I would far rather not see Mr Clennam.'

'Oh, fie, fie, my dear, that's folly. Mr Clennam is a very gentlemanly man - very gentlemanly. A little reserved at times; but I will say extremely gentlemanly. I couldn't think of your not being here to receive Mr Clennam, my dear, especially this afternoon. So go and freshen yourself up, Amy; go and freshen yourself up, like a good girl.'

Thus directed, Little Dorrit dutifully rose and obeyed: only pausing for a moment as she went out of the room, to give her sister a kiss of reconciliation. Upon which, that young lady, feeling much harassed in her mind, and having for the time worn out the wish with which she generally relieved it, conceived and executed the brilliant idea of wishing Old Nandy dead, rather than that he should come bothering there like a disgusting, tiresome, wicked wretch, and making mischief between two sisters.

The Father of the Marshalsea, even humming a tune, and wearing his black velvet cap a little on one side, so much improved were his spirits, went down into the yard, and found his old pensioner standing there hat in hand just within the gate, as he had stood all this time. 'Come, Nandy!' said he, with great suavity. 'Come up-stairs, Nandy; you know the way; why don't you come up-stairs?' He went the length, on this occasion, of giving him his hand and saying, 'How are you, Nandy? Are you pretty well?' To which that vocalist returned, 'I thank you, honoured sir, I am all the better for seeing your honour.' As they went along the yard, the Father of the Marshalsea presented him to a Collegian of recent date. 'An old acquaintance of mine, sir, an old pensioner.' And then said, 'Be covered, my good Nandy; put your hat on,' with great consideration.

His patronage did not stop here; for he charged Maggy to get the tea ready, and instructed her to buy certain tea-cakes, fresh butter, eggs, cold ham, and shrimps: to purchase which collation he gave her a bank-note for ten pounds, laying strict injunctions on her to be careful of the change. These preparations were in an advanced stage of progress, and his daughter Amy had come back with her work, when Clennam presented himself; whom he most graciously received, and besought to join their meal.

'Amy, my love, you know Mr Clennam even better than I have the happiness of doing. Fanny, my dear, you are acquainted with Mr Clennam.' Fanny acknowledged him haughtily; the position she tacitly took up in all such cases being that there was a vast conspiracy to insult the family by not understanding it, or sufficiently deferring to it, and here was one of the conspirators.

'This, Mr Clennam, you must know, is an old pensioner of mine, Old Nandy, a very faithful old man.' (He always spoke of him as an object of great antiquity, but he was two or three years younger than himself.) 'Let me see. You know Plornish, I think? I think my daughter Amy has mentioned to me that you know poor Plornish?'

'O yes!' said Arthur Clennam.

'Well, sir, this is Mrs Plornish's father.'

'Indeed? I am glad to see him.'

'You would be more glad if you knew his many good qualities, Mr Clennam.'

'I hope I shall come to know them through knowing him,' said Arthur, secretly pitying the bowed and submissive figure.

'It is a holiday with him, and he comes to see his old friends, who are always glad to see him,' observed the Father of the Marshalsea.

Then he added behind his hand, ('Union, poor old fellow. Out for the day.')

By this time Maggy, quietly assisted by her Little Mother, had spread the board, and the repast was ready. It being hot weather and the prison very close, the window was as wide open as it could be pushed. 'If Maggy will spread that newspaper on the window- sill, my dear,' remarked the Father complacently and in a half whisper to Little Dorrit, 'my old pensioner can have his tea there, while we are having ours.'

So, with a gulf between him and the good company of about a foot in width, standard measure, Mrs Plornish's father was handsomely regaled. Clennam had never seen anything like his magnanimous protection by that other Father, he of the Marshalsea; and was lost in the contemplation of its many wonders.

The most striking of these was perhaps the relishing manner in which he remarked on the pensioner's infirmities and failings, as if he were a gracious Keeper making a running commentary on the decline of the harmless animal he exhibited.

'Not ready for more ham yet, Nandy? Why, how slow you are! (His last teeth,' he explained to the company, 'are going, poor old boy.')

At another time, he said, 'No shrimps, Nandy?' and on his not instantly replying, observed, ('His hearing is becoming very defective. He'll be deaf directly.')

At another time he asked him, 'Do you walk much, Nandy, about the yard within the walls of that place of yours?'

'No, sir; no. I haven't any great liking for that.'

'No, to be sure,' he assented. 'Very natural.' Then he privately informed the circle ('Legs going.')

Once he asked the pensioner, in that general clemency which asked him anything to keep him afloat, how old his younger grandchild was?

'John Edward,' said the pensioner, slowly laying down his knife and fork to consider. 'How old, sir? Let me think now.'

The Father of the Marshalsea tapped his forehead ('Memory weak.')

'John Edward, sir? Well, I really forget. I couldn't say at this minute, sir, whether it's two and two months, or whether it's two and five months. It's one or the other.'

'Don't distress yourself by worrying your mind about it,' he returned, with infinite forbearance. ('Faculties evidently decaying - old man rusts in the life he leads!')

The more of these discoveries that he persuaded himself he made in the pensioner, the better he appeared to like him; and when he got out of his chair after tea to bid the pensioner good-bye, on his intimating that he feared, honoured sir, his time was running out, he made himself look as erect and strong as possible.

'We don't call this a shilling, Nandy, you know,' he said, putting one in his hand. 'We call it tobacco.'

'Honoured sir, I thank you. It shall buy tobacco. My thanks and duty to Miss Amy and Miss Fanny. I wish you good night, Mr Clennam.'

'And mind you don't forget us, you know, Nandy,' said the Father. 'You must come again, mind, whenever you have an afternoon. You must not come out without seeing us, or we shall be jealous. Good night, Nandy. Be very careful how you descend the stairs, Nandy; they are rather uneven and worn.' With that he stood on the landing, watching the old man down: and when he came into the room again, said, with a solemn satisfaction on him, 'A melancholy sight that, Mr Clennam, though one has the consolation of knowing that he doesn't feel it himself. The poor old fellow is a dismal wreck. Spirit broken and gone - pulverised - crushed out of him, sir, completely!'

As Clennam had a purpose in remaining, he said what he could responsive to these sentiments, and stood at the window with their enunciator, while Maggy and her Little Mother washed the tea- service and cleared it away. He noticed that his companion stood at the window with the air of an affable and accessible Sovereign, and that, when any of his people in the yard below looked up, his recognition of their salutes just stopped short of a blessing.

When Little Dorrit had her work on the table, and Maggy hers on the bedstead, Fanny fell to tying her bonnet as a preliminary to her departure. Arthur, still having his purpose, still remained. At this time the door opened, without any notice, and Mr Tip came in. He kissed Amy as she started up to meet him, nodded to Fanny, nodded to his father, gloomed on the visitor without further recognition, and sat down.

'Tip, dear,' said Little Dorrit, mildly, shocked by this, 'don't you see - '

'Yes, I see, Amy. If you refer to the presence of any visitor you have here - I say, if you refer to that,' answered Tip, jerking his head with emphasis towards his shoulder nearest Clennam, 'I see!'

'Is that all you say?'

'That's all I say. And I suppose,' added the lofty young man, after a moment's pause, 'that visitor will understand me, when I say that's all I say. In short, I suppose the visitor will understand that he hasn't used me like a gentleman.'

'I do not understand that,' observed the obnoxious personage referred to with tranquillity.

'No? Why, then, to make it clearer to you, sir, I beg to let you know that when I address what I call a properly-worded appeal, and an urgent appeal, and a delicate appeal, to an individual, for a small temporary accommodation, easily within his power - easily within his power, mind! - and when that individual writes back word to me that he begs to be excused, I consider that he doesn't treat me like a gentleman.'

The Father of the Marshalsea, who had surveyed his son in silence, no sooner heard this sentiment, than he began in angry voice: -

'How dare you - ' But his son stopped him.

'Now, don't ask me how I dare, father, because that's bosh. As to the fact of the line of conduct I choose to adopt towards the individual present, you ought to be proud of my showing a proper spirit.'

'I should think so!' cried Fanny.

'A proper spirit?' said the Father. 'Yes, a proper spirit; a becoming spirit. Is it come to this that my son teaches me - ME - spirit!'

'Now, don't let us bother about it, father, or have any row on the subject. I have fully made up my mind that the individual present has not treated me like a gentleman. And there's an end of it.'

'But there is not an end of it, sir,' returned the Father. 'But there shall not be an end of it. You have made up your mind? You have made up your mind?'

'Yes, I have. What's the good of keeping on like that?'

'Because,' returned the Father, in a great heat, 'you had no right to make up your mind to what is monstrous, to what is - ha - immoral, to what is - hum - parricidal. No, Mr Clennam, I beg, sir. Don't ask me to desist; there is a - hum - a general principle involved here, which rises even above considerations of - ha - hospitality. I object to the assertion made by my son. I - ha - I personally repel it.'

'Why, what is it to you, father?' returned the son, over his shoulder.

'What is it to me, sir? I have a - hum - a spirit, sir, that will not endure it. I,' he took out his pocket-handkerchief again and dabbed his face. 'I am outraged and insulted by it. Let me suppose the case that I myself may at a certain time - ha - or times, have made a - hum - an appeal, and a properly-worded appeal, and a delicate appeal, and an urgent appeal to some individual for a small temporary accommodation. Let me suppose that that accommodation could have

been easily extended, and was not extended, and that that individual informed me that he begged to be excused. Am I to be told by my own son, that I therefore received treatment not due to a gentleman, and that I - ha - I submitted to it?'

His daughter Amy gently tried to calm him, but he would not on any account be calmed. He said his spirit was up, and wouldn't endure this.

Was he to be told that, he wished to know again, by his own son on his own hearth, to his own face? Was that humiliation to be put upon him by his own blood?

'You are putting it on yourself, father, and getting into all this injury of your own accord!' said the young gentleman morosely. 'What I have made up my mind about has nothing to do with you. What I said had nothing to do with you. Why need you go trying on other people's hats?'

'I reply it has everything to do with me,' returned the Father. 'I point out to you, sir, with indignation, that - hum - the - ha - delicacy and peculiarity of your father's position should strike you dumb, sir, if nothing else should, in laying down such - ha - such unnatural principles. Besides; if you are not filial, sir, if you discard that duty, you are at least - hum - not a Christian? Are you - ha - an Atheist? And is it Christian, let me ask you, to stigmatise and denounce an individual for begging to be excused this time, when the same individual may - ha - respond with the required accommodation next time? Is it the part of a Christian not to - hum - not to try him again?' He had worked himself into quite a religious glow and fervour.

'I see precious well,' said Mr Tip, rising, 'that I shall get no sensible or fair argument here to-night, and so the best thing I can do is to cut. Good night, Amy. Don't be vexed. I am very sorry it happens here, and you here, upon my soul I am; but I can't altogether part with my spirit, even for your sake, old girl.'

With those words he put on his hat and went out, accompanied by Miss Fanny; who did not consider it spirited on her part to take leave of Clennam with any less opposing demonstration than a stare, importing that she had always known him for one of the large body of conspirators.

When they were gone, the Father of the Marshalsea was at first inclined to sink into despondency again, and would have done so, but that a gentleman opportunely came up within a minute or two to attend him to the Snuggery. It was the gentleman Clennam had seen on the night of his own accidental detention there, who had that

impalpable grievance about the misappropriated Fund on which the Marshal was supposed to batten. He presented himself as deputation to escort the Father to the Chair, it being an occasion on which he had promised to preside over the assembled Collegians in the enjoyment of a little Harmony.

'Such, you see, Mr Clennam,' said the Father, 'are the incongruities of my position here. But a public duty! No man, I am sure, would more readily recognise a public duty than yourself.'

Clennam besought him not to delay a moment. 'Amy, my dear, if you can persuade Mr Clennam to stay longer, I can leave the honours of our poor apology for an establishment with confidence in your hands, and perhaps you may do something towards erasing from Mr Clennam's mind the - ha - untoward and unpleasant circumstance which has occurred since tea-time.'

Clennam assured him that it had made no impression on his mind, and therefore required no erasure.

'My dear sir,' said the Father, with a removal of his black cap and a grasp of Clennam's hand, combining to express the safe receipt of his note and enclosure that afternoon, 'Heaven ever bless you!'

So, at last, Clennam's purpose in remaining was attained, and he could speak to Little Dorrit with nobody by. Maggy counted as nobody, and she was by.