

## Chapter VI

### **In which the Occurrence of the Accident mentioned in the last Chapter, affords an Opportunity to a couple of Gentlemen to tell Stories against each other**

'Wo ho!' cried the guard, on his legs in a minute, and running to the leaders' heads. 'Is there ony genelmen there as can len' a hond here? Keep quiet, dang ye! Wo ho!'

'What's the matter?' demanded Nicholas, looking sleepily up.

'Matther mun, matter eneaf for one neight,' replied the guard; 'dang the wall-eyed bay, he's gane mad wi' glory I think, carse t'coorch is over. Here, can't ye len' a hond? Dom it, I'd ha' dean it if all my boans were brokken.'

'Here!' cried Nicholas, staggering to his feet, 'I'm ready. I'm only a little abroad, that's all.'

'Hoold 'em toight,' cried the guard, 'while ar coot treaces. Hang on tiv'em sumhoo. Well deane, my lod. That's it. Let'em goa noo. Dang 'em, they'll gang whoam fast eneaf!'

In truth, the animals were no sooner released than they trotted back, with much deliberation, to the stable they had just left, which was distant not a mile behind.

'Can you blo' a harn?' asked the guard, disengaging one of the coach-lamps.

'I dare say I can,' replied Nicholas.

'Then just blo' away into that 'un as lies on the grund, fit to wakken the deead, will'ee,' said the man, 'while I stop sum o' this here squealing inside. Cumin', cumin'. Dean't make that noise, wooman.'

As the man spoke, he proceeded to wrench open the uppermost door of the coach, while Nicholas, seizing the horn, awoke the echoes far and wide with one of the most extraordinary performances on that instrument ever heard by mortal ears. It had its effect, however, not only in rousing such of their fall, but in summoning assistance to their relief; for lights gleamed in the distance, and people were already astir.

In fact, a man on horseback galloped down, before the passengers were well collected together; and a careful investigation being instituted, it appeared that the lady inside had broken her lamp, and

the gentleman his head; that the two front outsides had escaped with black eyes; the box with a bloody nose; the coachman with a contusion on the temple; Mr Squeers with a portmanteau bruise on his back; and the remaining passengers without any injury at all - thanks to the softness of the snow-drift in which they had been overturned. These facts were no sooner thoroughly ascertained, than the lady gave several indications of fainting, but being forewarned that if she did, she must be carried on some gentleman's shoulders to the nearest public-house, she prudently thought better of it, and walked back with the rest.

They found on reaching it, that it was a lonely place with no very great accommodation in the way of apartments - that portion of its resources being all comprised in one public room with a sanded floor, and a chair or two. However, a large faggot and a plentiful supply of coals being heaped upon the fire, the appearance of things was not long in mending; and, by the time they had washed off all effaceable marks of the late accident, the room was warm and light, which was a most agreeable exchange for the cold and darkness out of doors.

'Well, Mr Nickleby,' said Squeers, insinuating himself into the warmest corner, 'you did very right to catch hold of them horses. I should have done it myself if I had come to in time, but I am very glad you did it. You did it very well; very well.'

'So well,' said the merry-faced gentleman, who did not seem to approve very much of the patronising tone adopted by Squeers, 'that if they had not been firmly checked when they were, you would most probably have had no brains left to teach with.'

This remark called up a discourse relative to the promptitude Nicholas had displayed, and he was overwhelmed with compliments and commendations.

'I am very glad to have escaped, of course,' observed Squeers: 'every man is glad when he escapes from danger; but if any one of my charges had been hurt - if I had been prevented from restoring any one of these little boys to his parents whole and sound as I received him - what would have been my feelings? Why the wheel a-top of my head would have been far preferable to it.'

'Are they all brothers, sir?' inquired the lady who had carried the 'Davy' or safety-lamp.

'In one sense they are, ma'am,' replied Squeers, diving into his greatcoat pocket for cards. 'They are all under the same parental and affectionate treatment. Mrs Squeers and myself are a mother and father to every one of 'em. Mr Nickleby, hand the lady them cards, and

offer these to the gentleman. Perhaps they might know of some parents that would be glad to avail themselves of the establishment.'

Expressing himself to this effect, Mr Squeers, who lost no opportunity of advertising gratuitously, placed his hands upon his knees, and looked at the pupils with as much benignity as he could possibly affect, while Nicholas, blushing with shame, handed round the cards as directed.

'I hope you suffer no inconvenience from the overturn, ma'am?' said the merry-faced gentleman, addressing the fastidious lady, as though he were charitably desirous to change the subject.

'No bodily inconvenience,' replied the lady.

'No mental inconvenience, I hope?'

'The subject is a very painful one to my feelings, sir,' replied the lady with strong emotion; 'and I beg you as a gentleman, not to refer to it.'

'Dear me,' said the merry-faced gentleman, looking merrier still, 'I merely intended to inquire - '

'I hope no inquiries will be made,' said the lady, 'or I shall be compelled to throw myself on the protection of the other gentlemen. Landlord, pray direct a boy to keep watch outside the door - and if a green chariot passes in the direction of Grantham, to stop it instantly.'

The people of the house were evidently overcome by this request, and when the lady charged the boy to remember, as a means of identifying the expected green chariot, that it would have a coachman with a gold-laced hat on the box, and a footman, most probably in silk stockings, behind, the attentions of the good woman of the inn were redoubled. Even the box-passenger caught the infection, and growing wonderfully deferential, immediately inquired whether there was not very good society in that neighbourhood, to which the lady replied yes, there was: in a manner which sufficiently implied that she moved at the very tiptop and summit of it all.

'As the guard has gone on horseback to Grantham to get another coach,' said the good-tempered gentleman when they had been all sitting round the fire, for some time, in silence, 'and as he must be gone a couple of hours at the very least, I propose a bowl of hot punch. What say you, sir?'

This question was addressed to the broken-headed inside, who was a man of very genteel appearance, dressed in mourning. He was not past the middle age, but his hair was grey; it seemed to have been

prematurely turned by care or sorrow. He readily acceded to the proposal, and appeared to be prepossessed by the frank good-nature of the individual from whom it emanated.

This latter personage took upon himself the office of tapster when the punch was ready, and after dispensing it all round, led the conversation to the antiquities of York, with which both he and the grey-haired gentleman appeared to be well acquainted. When this topic flagged, he turned with a smile to the grey-headed gentleman, and asked if he could sing.

'I cannot indeed,' replied gentleman, smiling in his turn.

'That's a pity,' said the owner of the good-humoured countenance. 'Is there nobody here who can sing a song to lighten the time?'

The passengers, one and all, protested that they could not; that they wished they could; that they couldn't remember the words of anything without the book; and so forth.

'Perhaps the lady would not object,' said the president with great respect, and a merry twinkle in his eye. 'Some little Italian thing out of the last opera brought out in town, would be most acceptable I am sure.'

As the lady condescended to make no reply, but tossed her head contemptuously, and murmured some further expression of surprise regarding the absence of the green chariot, one or two voices urged upon the president himself, the propriety of making an attempt for the general benefit.

'I would if I could,' said he of the good-tempered face; 'for I hold that in this, as in all other cases where people who are strangers to each other are thrown unexpectedly together, they should endeavour to render themselves as pleasant, for the joint sake of the little community, as possible.'

'I wish the maxim were more generally acted on, in all cases,' said the grey-headed gentleman.

'I'm glad to hear it,' returned the other. 'Perhaps, as you can't sing, you'll tell us a story?'

'Nay. I should ask you.'

'After you, I will, with pleasure.'

'Indeed!' said the grey-haired gentleman, smiling, 'Well, let it be so. I fear the turn of my thoughts is not calculated to lighten the time you must pass here; but you have brought this upon yourselves, and shall judge. We were speaking of York Minster just now. My story shall have some reference to it. Let us call it

#### THE FIVE SISTERS OF YORK

After a murmur of approbation from the other passengers, during which the fastidious lady drank a glass of punch unobserved, the grey-headed gentleman thus went on:

'A great many years ago - for the fifteenth century was scarce two years old at the time, and King Henry the Fourth sat upon the throne of England - there dwelt, in the ancient city of York, five maiden sisters, the subjects of my tale.

'These five sisters were all of surpassing beauty. The eldest was in her twenty-third year, the second a year younger, the third a year younger than the second, and the fourth a year younger than the third. They were tall stately figures, with dark flashing eyes and hair of jet; dignity and grace were in their every movement; and the fame of their great beauty had spread through all the country round.

'But, if the four elder sisters were lovely, how beautiful was the youngest, a fair creature of sixteen! The blushing tints in the soft bloom on the fruit, or the delicate painting on the flower, are not more exquisite than was the blending of the rose and lily in her gentle face, or the deep blue of her eye. The vine, in all its elegant luxuriance, is not more graceful than were the clusters of rich brown hair that sported round her brow.

'If we all had hearts like those which beat so lightly in the bosoms of the young and beautiful, what a heaven this earth would be! If, while our bodies grow old and withered, our hearts could but retain their early youth and freshness, of what avail would be our sorrows and sufferings! But, the faint image of Eden which is stamped upon them in childhood, chafes and rubs in our rough struggles with the world, and soon wears away: too often to leave nothing but a mournful blank remaining.

'The heart of this fair girl bounded with joy and gladness. Devoted attachment to her sisters, and a fervent love of all beautiful things in nature, were its pure affections. Her gleesome voice and merry laugh were the sweetest music of their home. She was its very light and life. The brightest flowers in the garden were reared by her; the caged birds sang when they heard her voice, and pined when they missed its

sweetness. Alice, dear Alice; what living thing within the sphere of her gentle witchery, could fail to love her!

'You may seek in vain, now, for the spot on which these sisters lived, for their very names have passed away, and dusty antiquaries tell of them as of a fable. But they dwelt in an old wooden house - old even in those days - with overhanging gables and balconies of rudely-carved oak, which stood within a pleasant orchard, and was surrounded by a rough stone wall, whence a stout archer might have winged an arrow to St Mary's Abbey. The old abbey flourished then; and the five sisters, living on its fair domains, paid yearly dues to the black monks of St Benedict, to which fraternity it belonged.

'It was a bright and sunny morning in the pleasant time of summer, when one of those black monks emerged from the abbey portal, and bent his steps towards the house of the fair sisters. Heaven above was blue, and earth beneath was green; the river glistened like a path of diamonds in the sun; the birds poured forth their songs from the shady trees; the lark soared high above the waving corn; and the deep buzz of insects filled the air. Everything looked gay and smiling; but the holy man walked gloomily on, with his eyes bent upon the ground. The beauty of the earth is but a breath, and man is but a shadow. What sympathy should a holy preacher have with either?

'With eyes bent upon the ground, then, or only raised enough to prevent his stumbling over such obstacles as lay in his way, the religious man moved slowly forward until he reached a small postern in the wall of the sisters' orchard, through which he passed, closing it behind him. The noise of soft voices in conversation, and of merry laughter, fell upon his ears ere he had advanced many paces; and raising his eyes higher than was his humble wont, he descried, at no great distance, the five sisters seated on the grass, with Alice in the centre: all busily plying their customary task of embroidering.

'Save you, fair daughters!' said the friar; and fair in truth they were. Even a monk might have loved them as choice masterpieces of his Maker's hand.

'The sisters saluted the holy man with becoming reverence, and the eldest motioned him to a mossy seat beside them. But the good friar shook his head, and bumped himself down on a very hard stone, - at which, no doubt, approving angels were gratified.

'Ye were merry, daughters,' said the monk.

'You know how light of heart sweet Alice is,' replied the eldest sister, passing her fingers through the tresses of the smiling girl.

"And what joy and cheerfulness it wakes up within us, to see all nature beaming in brightness and sunshine, father," added Alice, blushing beneath the stern look of the recluse.

"The monk answered not, save by a grave inclination of the head, and the sisters pursued their task in silence.

"Still wasting the precious hours," said the monk at length, turning to the eldest sister as he spoke, "still wasting the precious hours on this vain trifling. Alas, alas! that the few bubbles on the surface of eternity - all that Heaven wills we should see of that dark deep stream - should be so lightly scattered!"

"Father," urged the maiden, pausing, as did each of the others, in her busy task, "we have prayed at matins, our daily alms have been distributed at the gate, the sick peasants have been tended, - all our morning tasks have been performed. I hope our occupation is a blameless one?"

"See here," said the friar, taking the frame from her hand, "an intricate winding of gaudy colours, without purpose or object, unless it be that one day it is destined for some vain ornament, to minister to the pride of your frail and giddy sex. Day after day has been employed upon this senseless task, and yet it is not half accomplished. The shade of each departed day falls upon our graves, and the worm exults as he beholds it, to know that we are hastening thither. Daughters, is there no better way to pass the fleeting hours?"

"The four elder sisters cast down their eyes as if abashed by the holy man's reproof, but Alice raised hers, and bent them mildly on the friar.

"Our dear mother," said the maiden; "Heaven rest her soul!"

"Amen!" cried the friar in a deep voice.

"Our dear mother," faltered the fair Alice, "was living when these long tasks began, and bade us, when she should be no more, ply them in all discretion and cheerfulness, in our leisure hours; she said that if in harmless mirth and maidenly pursuits we passed those hours together, they would prove the happiest and most peaceful of our lives, and that if, in later times, we went forth into the world, and mingled with its cares and trials - if, allured by its temptations and dazzled by its glitter, we ever forgot that love and duty which should bind, in holy ties, the children of one loved parent - a glance at the old work of our common girlhood would awaken good thoughts of bygone days, and soften our hearts to affection and love."

'Alice speaks truly, father,' said the elder sister, somewhat proudly. And so saying she resumed her work, as did the others.

'It was a kind of sampler of large size, that each sister had before her; the device was of a complex and intricate description, and the pattern and colours of all five were the same. The sisters bent gracefully over their work; the monk, resting his chin upon his hands, looked from one to the other in silence.

'How much better,' he said at length, 'to shun all such thoughts and chances, and, in the peaceful shelter of the church, devote your lives to Heaven! Infancy, childhood, the prime of life, and old age, wither as rapidly as they crowd upon each other. Think how human dust rolls onward to the tomb, and turning your faces steadily towards that goal, avoid the cloud which takes its rise among the pleasures of the world, and cheats the senses of their votaries. The veil, daughters, the veil!'

'Never, sisters,' cried Alice. 'Barter not the light and air of heaven, and the freshness of earth and all the beautiful things which breathe upon it, for the cold cloister and the cell. Nature's own blessings are the proper goods of life, and we may share them sinlessly together. To die is our heavy portion, but, oh, let us die with life about us; when our cold hearts cease to beat, let warm hearts be beating near; let our last look be upon the bounds which God has set to his own bright skies, and not on stone walls and bars of iron! Dear sisters, let us live and die, if you list, in this green garden's compass; only shun the gloom and sadness of a cloister, and we shall be happy.'

'The tears fell fast from the maiden's eyes as she closed her impassioned appeal, and hid her face in the bosom of her sister.

'Take comfort, Alice,' said the eldest, kissing her fair forehead. 'The veil shall never cast its shadow on thy young brow. How say you, sisters? For yourselves you speak, and not for Alice, or for me.'

'The sisters, as with one accord, cried that their lot was cast together, and that there were dwellings for peace and virtue beyond the convent's walls.

'Father,' said the eldest lady, rising with dignity, 'you hear our final resolve. The same pious care which enriched the abbey of St Mary, and left us, orphans, to its holy guardianship, directed that no constraint should be imposed upon our inclinations, but that we should be free to live according to our choice. Let us hear no more of this, we pray you. Sisters, it is nearly noon. Let us take shelter until evening!' With a reverence to the friar, the lady rose and walked towards the house, hand in hand with Alice; the other sisters followed.



'The holy man, who had often urged the same point before, but had never met with so direct a repulse, walked some little distance behind, with his eyes bent upon the earth, and his lips moving AS IF in prayer. As the sisters reached the porch, he quickened his pace, and called upon them to stop.

'Stay!' said the monk, raising his right hand in the air, and directing an angry glance by turns at Alice and the eldest sister. 'Stay, and hear from me what these recollections are, which you would cherish above eternity, and awaken - if in mercy they slumbered - by means of idle toys. The memory of earthly things is charged, in after life, with bitter disappointment, affliction, death; with dreary change and wasting sorrow. The time will one day come, when a glance at those unmeaning baubles will tear open deep wounds in the hearts of some among you, and strike to your inmost souls. When that hour arrives - and, mark me, come it will - turn from the world to which you clung, to the refuge which you spurned. Find me the cell which shall be colder than the fire of mortals grows, when dimmed by calamity and trial, and there weep for the dreams of youth. These things are Heaven's will, not mine,' said the friar, subduing his voice as he looked round upon the shrinking girls. 'The Virgin's blessing be upon you, daughters!'

'With these words he disappeared through the postern; and the sisters hastening into the house were seen no more that day.

'But nature will smile though priests may frown, and next day the sun shone brightly, and on the next, and the next again. And in the morning's glare, and the evening's soft repose, the five sisters still walked, or worked, or beguiled the time by cheerful conversation, in their quiet orchard.

'Time passed away as a tale that is told; faster indeed than many tales that are told, of which number I fear this may be one. The house of the five sisters stood where it did, and the same trees cast their pleasant shade upon the orchard grass. The sisters too were there, and lovely as at first, but a change had come over their dwelling. Sometimes, there was the clash of armour, and the gleaming of the moon on caps of steel; and, at others, jaded coursers were spurred up to the gate, and a female form glided hurriedly forth, as if eager to demand tidings of the weary messenger. A goodly train of knights and ladies lodged one night within the abbey walls, and next day rode away, with two of the fair sisters among them. Then, horsemen began to come less frequently, and seemed to bring bad tidings when they did, and at length they ceased to come at all, and footsore peasants slunk to the gate after sunset, and did their errand there, by stealth. Once, a vassal was dispatched in haste to the abbey at dead of night, and when morning came, there were sounds of woe and wailing in the

sisters' house; and after this, a mournful silence fell upon it, and knight or lady, horse or armour, was seen about it no more.

'There was a sullen darkness in the sky, and the sun had gone angrily down, tinting the dull clouds with the last traces of his wrath, when the same black monk walked slowly on, with folded arms, within a stone's-throw of the abbey. A blight had fallen on the trees and shrubs; and the wind, at length beginning to break the unnatural stillness that had prevailed all day, sighed heavily from time to time, as though foretelling in grief the ravages of the coming storm. The bat skimmed in fantastic flights through the heavy air, and the ground was alive with crawling things, whose instinct brought them forth to swell and fatten in the rain.

'No longer were the friar's eyes directed to the earth; they were cast abroad, and roamed from point to point, as if the gloom and desolation of the scene found a quick response in his own bosom. Again he paused near the sisters' house, and again he entered by the postern.

'But not again did his ear encounter the sound of laughter, or his eyes rest upon the beautiful figures of the five sisters. All was silent and deserted. The boughs of the trees were bent and broken, and the grass had grown long and rank. No light feet had pressed it for many, many a day.

'With the indifference or abstraction of one well accustomed to the change, the monk glided into the house, and entered a low, dark room. Four sisters sat there. Their black garments made their pale faces whiter still, and time and sorrow had worked deep ravages. They were stately yet; but the flush and pride of beauty were gone.

'And Alice - where was she? In Heaven.

'The monk - even the monk - could bear with some grief here; for it was long since these sisters had met, and there were furrows in their blanched faces which years could never plough. He took his seat in silence, and motioned them to continue their speech.

'They are here, sisters,' said the elder lady in a trembling voice. 'I have never borne to look upon them since, and now I blame myself for my weakness. What is there in her memory that we should dread? To call up our old days shall be a solemn pleasure yet.'

'She glanced at the monk as she spoke, and, opening a cabinet, brought forth the five frames of work, completed long before. Her step was firm, but her hand trembled as she produced the last one; and,

when the feelings of the other sisters gushed forth at sight of it, her pent-up tears made way, and she sobbed 'God bless her!'

'The monk rose and advanced towards them. 'It was almost the last thing she touched in health,' he said in a low voice.

'It was,' cried the elder lady, weeping bitterly.

'The monk turned to the second sister.

'The gallant youth who looked into thine eyes, and hung upon thy very breath when first he saw thee intent upon this pastime, lies buried on a plain whereof the turf is red with blood. Rusty fragments of armour, once brightly burnished, lie rotting on the ground, and are as little distinguishable for his, as are the bones that crumble in the mould!'

'The lady groaned, and wrung her hands.

'The policy of courts,' he continued, turning to the two other sisters, 'drew ye from your peaceful home to scenes of revelry and splendour. The same policy, and the restless ambition of - proud and fiery men, have sent ye back, widowed maidens, and humbled outcasts. Do I speak truly?'

'The sobs of the two sisters were their only reply.

'There is little need,' said the monk, with a meaning look, 'to fritter away the time in gewgaws which shall raise up the pale ghosts of hopes of early years. Bury them, heap penance and mortification on their heads, keep them down, and let the convent be their grave!'

'The sisters asked for three days to deliberate; and felt, that night, as though the veil were indeed the fitting shroud for their dead joys. But, morning came again, and though the boughs of the orchard trees drooped and ran wild upon the ground, it was the same orchard still. The grass was coarse and high, but there was yet the spot on which they had so often sat together, when change and sorrow were but names. There was every walk and nook which Alice had made glad; and in the minster nave was one flat stone beneath which she slept in peace.

'And could they, remembering how her young heart had sickened at the thought of cloistered walls, look upon her grave, in garbs which would chill the very ashes within it? Could they bow down in prayer, and when all Heaven turned to hear them, bring the dark shade of sadness on one angel's face? No.

'They sent abroad, to artists of great celebrity in those times, and having obtained the church's sanction to their work of piety, caused to be executed, in five large compartments of richly stained glass, a faithful copy of their old embroidery work. These were fitted into a large window until that time bare of ornament; and when the sun shone brightly, as she had so well loved to see it, the familiar patterns were reflected in their original colours, and throwing a stream of brilliant light upon the pavement, fell warmly on the name of Alice.

'For many hours in every day, the sisters paced slowly up and down the nave, or knelt by the side of the flat broad stone. Only three were seen in the customary place, after many years; then but two, and, for a long time afterwards, but one solitary female bent with age. At length she came no more, and the stone bore five plain Christian names.

'That stone has worn away and been replaced by others, and many generations have come and gone since then. Time has softened down the colours, but the same stream of light still falls upon the forgotten tomb, of which no trace remains; and, to this day, the stranger is shown in York Cathedral, an old window called the Five Sisters.'

'That's a melancholy tale,' said the merry-faced gentleman, emptying his glass.

'It is a tale of life, and life is made up of such sorrows,' returned the other, courteously, but in a grave and sad tone of voice.

'There are shades in all good pictures, but there are lights too, if we choose to contemplate them,' said the gentleman with the merry face. 'The youngest sister in your tale was always light-hearted.'

'And died early,' said the other, gently.

'She would have died earlier, perhaps, had she been less happy,' said the first speaker, with much feeling. 'Do you think the sisters who loved her so well, would have grieved the less if her life had been one of gloom and sadness? If anything could soothe the first sharp pain of a heavy loss, it would be - with me - the reflection, that those I mourned, by being innocently happy here, and loving all about them, had prepared themselves for a purer and happier world. The sun does not shine upon this fair earth to meet frowning eyes, depend upon it.'

'I believe you are right,' said the gentleman who had told the story.

'Believe!' retorted the other, 'can anybody doubt it? Take any subject of sorrowful regret, and see with how much pleasure it is associated. The recollection of past pleasure may become pain - '

'It does,' interposed the other.

'Well; it does. To remember happiness which cannot be restored, is pain, but of a softened kind. Our recollections are unfortunately mingled with much that we deplore, and with many actions which we bitterly repent; still in the most chequered life I firmly think there are so many little rays of sunshine to look back upon, that I do not believe any mortal (unless he had put himself without the pale of hope) would deliberately drain a goblet of the waters of Lethe, if he had it in his power.'

'Possibly you are correct in that belief,' said the grey-haired gentleman after a short reflection. 'I am inclined to think you are.'

'Why, then,' replied the other, 'the good in this state of existence preponderates over the bad, let miscalled philosophers tell us what they will. If our affections be tried, our affections are our consolation and comfort; and memory, however sad, is the best and purest link between this world and a better. But come! I'll tell you a story of another kind.'

After a very brief silence, the merry-faced gentleman sent round the punch, and glancing slyly at the fastidious lady, who seemed desperately apprehensive that he was going to relate something improper, began

#### THE BARON OF GROGZWIG

'The Baron Von Koeldwethout, of Grogzwig in Germany, was as likely a young baron as you would wish to see. I needn't say that he lived in a castle, because that's of course; neither need I say that he lived in an old castle; for what German baron ever lived in a new one? There were many strange circumstances connected with this venerable building, among which, not the least startling and mysterious were, that when the wind blew, it rumbled in the chimneys, or even howled among the trees in the neighbouring forest; and that when the moon shone, she found her way through certain small loopholes in the wall, and actually made some parts of the wide halls and galleries quite light, while she left others in gloomy shadow. I believe that one of the baron's ancestors, being short of money, had inserted a dagger in a gentleman who called one night to ask his way, and it WAS supposed that these miraculous occurrences took place in consequence. And yet I hardly know how that could have been, either, because the baron's ancestor, who was an amiable man, felt very sorry afterwards for having been so rash, and laying violent hands upon a quantity of stone and timber which belonged to a weaker baron, built a chapel as an apology, and so took a receipt from Heaven, in full of all demands.

'Talking of the baron's ancestor puts me in mind of the baron's great claims to respect, on the score of his pedigree. I am afraid to say, I am sure, how many ancestors the baron had; but I know that he had a great many more than any other man of his time; and I only wish that he had lived in these latter days, that he might have had more. It is a very hard thing upon the great men of past centuries, that they should have come into the world so soon, because a man who was born three or four hundred years ago, cannot reasonably be expected to have had as many relations before him, as a man who is born now. The last man, whoever he is - and he may be a cobbler or some low vulgar dog for aught we know - will have a longer pedigree than the greatest nobleman now alive; and I contend that this is not fair.

'Well, but the Baron Von Koeldwethout of Grogzwig! He was a fine swarthy fellow, with dark hair and large moustachios, who rode a-hunting in clothes of Lincoln green, with russet boots on his feet, and a bugle slung over his shoulder like the guard of a long stage. When he blew this bugle, four-and-twenty other gentlemen of inferior rank, in Lincoln green a little coarser, and russet boots with a little thicker soles, turned out directly: and away galloped the whole train, with spears in their hands like lacquered iron railings, to hunt down the boars, or perhaps encounter a bear: in which latter case the baron killed him first, and greased his whiskers with him afterwards.

'This was a merry life for the Baron of Grogzwig, and a merrier still for the baron's retainers, who drank Rhine wine every night till they fell under the table, and then had the bottles on the floor, and called for pipes. Never were such jolly, roystering, rollicking, merry-making blades, as the jovial crew of Grogzwig.

'But the pleasures of the table, or the pleasures of under the table, require a little variety; especially when the same five-and-twenty people sit daily down to the same board, to discuss the same subjects, and tell the same stories. The baron grew weary, and wanted excitement. He took to quarrelling with his gentlemen, and tried kicking two or three of them every day after dinner. This was a pleasant change at first; but it became monotonous after a week or so, and the baron felt quite out of sorts, and cast about, in despair, for some new amusement.

'One night, after a day's sport in which he had outdone Nimrod or Gillingwater, and slaughtered 'another fine bear,' and brought him home in triumph, the Baron Von Koeldwethout sat moodily at the head of his table, eyeing the smoky roof of the hall with a discontented aspect. He swallowed huge bumpers of wine, but the more he swallowed, the more he frowned. The gentlemen who had been honoured with the dangerous distinction of sitting on his right and

left, imitated him to a miracle in the drinking, and frowned at each other.

'I will!' cried the baron suddenly, smiting the table with his right hand, and twirling his moustache with his left. 'Fill to the Lady of Grogzwig!'

'The four-and-twenty Lincoln greens turned pale, with the exception of their four-and-twenty noses, which were unchangeable.

'I said to the Lady of Grogzwig,' repeated the baron, looking round the board.

'To the Lady of Grogzwig!' shouted the Lincoln greens; and down their four-and-twenty throats went four-and-twenty imperial pints of such rare old hock, that they smacked their eight-and-forty lips, and winked again.

'The fair daughter of the Baron Von Swillenhausen,' said Koeldwethout, condescending to explain. 'We will demand her in marriage of her father, ere the sun goes down tomorrow. If he refuse our suit, we will cut off his nose.'

'A hoarse murmur arose from the company; every man touched, first the hilt of his sword, and then the tip of his nose, with appalling significance.

'What a pleasant thing filial piety is to contemplate! If the daughter of the Baron Von Swillenhausen had pleaded a preoccupied heart, or fallen at her father's feet and corned them in salt tears, or only fainted away, and complimented the old gentleman in frantic ejaculations, the odds are a hundred to one but Swillenhausen Castle would have been turned out at window, or rather the baron turned out at window, and the castle demolished. The damsel held her peace, however, when an early messenger bore the request of Von Koeldwethout next morning, and modestly retired to her chamber, from the casement of which she watched the coming of the suitor and his retinue. She was no sooner assured that the horseman with the large moustachios was her proffered husband, than she hastened to her father's presence, and expressed her readiness to sacrifice herself to secure his peace. The venerable baron caught his child to his arms, and shed a wink of joy.

'There was great feasting at the castle, that day. The four-and-twenty Lincoln greens of Von Koeldwethout exchanged vows of eternal friendship with twelve Lincoln greens of Von Swillenhausen, and promised the old baron that they would drink his wine 'Till all was blue' - meaning probably until their whole countenances had acquired the same tint as their noses. Everybody slapped everybody else's back,

when the time for parting came; and the Baron Von Koeldwethout and his followers rode gaily home.

'For six mortal weeks, the bears and boars had a holiday. The houses of Koeldwethout and Swillenhausen were united; the spears rusted; and the baron's bugle grew hoarse for lack of blowing.

'Those were great times for the four-and-twenty; but, alas! their high and palmy days had taken boots to themselves, and were already walking off.

'My dear,' said the baroness.

'My love,' said the baron.

'Those coarse, noisy men - '

'Which, ma'am?' said the baron, starting.

'The baroness pointed, from the window at which they stood, to the courtyard beneath, where the unconscious Lincoln greens were taking a copious stirrup-cup, preparatory to issuing forth after a boar or two.

'My hunting train, ma'am,' said the baron.

'Disband them, love,' murmured the baroness.

'Disband them!' cried the baron, in amazement.

'To please me, love,' replied the baroness.

'To please the devil, ma'am,' answered the baron.

'Whereupon the baroness uttered a great cry, and swooned away at the baron's feet.

'What could the baron do? He called for the lady's maid, and roared for the doctor; and then, rushing into the yard, kicked the two Lincoln greens who were the most used to it, and cursing the others all round, bade them go - but never mind where. I don't know the German for it, or I would put it delicately that way.

'It is not for me to say by what means, or by what degrees, some wives manage to keep down some husbands as they do, although I may have my private opinion on the subject, and may think that no Member of Parliament ought to be married, inasmuch as three married members out of every four, must vote according to their wives' consciences (if there be such things), and not according to their own.



All I need say, just now, is, that the Baroness Von Koeldwethout somehow or other acquired great control over the Baron Von Koeldwethout, and that, little by little, and bit by bit, and day by day, and year by year, the baron got the worst of some disputed question, or was slyly unhorsed from some old hobby; and that by the time he was a fat hearty fellow of forty-eight or thereabouts, he had no feasting, no revelry, no hunting train, and no hunting - nothing in short that he liked, or used to have; and that, although he was as fierce as a lion, and as bold as brass, he was decidedly snubbed and put down, by his own lady, in his own castle of Grogzwig.

'Nor was this the whole extent of the baron's misfortunes. About a year after his nuptials, there came into the world a lusty young baron, in whose honour a great many fireworks were let off, and a great many dozens of wine drunk; but next year there came a young baroness, and next year another young baron, and so on, every year, either a baron or baroness (and one year both together), until the baron found himself the father of a small family of twelve. Upon every one of these anniversaries, the venerable Baroness Von Swillenhausen was nervously sensitive for the well-being of her child the Baroness Von Koeldwethout; and although it was not found that the good lady ever did anything material towards contributing to her child's recovery, still she made it a point of duty to be as nervous as possible at the castle of Grogzwig, and to divide her time between moral observations on the baron's housekeeping, and bewailing the hard lot of her unhappy daughter. And if the Baron of Grogzwig, a little hurt and irritated at this, took heart, and ventured to suggest that his wife was at least no worse off than the wives of other barons, the Baroness Von Swillenhausen begged all persons to take notice, that nobody but she, sympathised with her dear daughter's sufferings; upon which, her relations and friends remarked, that to be sure she did cry a great deal more than her son-in-law, and that if there were a hard-hearted brute alive, it was that Baron of Grogzwig.

'The poor baron bore it all as long as he could, and when he could bear it no longer lost his appetite and his spirits, and sat himself gloomily and dejectedly down. But there were worse troubles yet in store for him, and as they came on, his melancholy and sadness increased. Times changed. He got into debt. The Grogzwig coffers ran low, though the Swillenhausen family had looked upon them as inexhaustible; and just when the baroness was on the point of making a thirteenth addition to the family pedigree, Von Koeldwethout discovered that he had no means of replenishing them.

'I don't see what is to be done,' said the baron. 'I think I'll kill myself.'

'This was a bright idea. The baron took an old hunting-knife from a cupboard hard by, and having sharpened it on his boot, made what boys call 'an offer' at his throat.

'Hem!' said the baron, stopping short. 'Perhaps it's not sharp enough.'

'The baron sharpened it again, and made another offer, when his hand was arrested by a loud screaming among the young barons and baronesses, who had a nursery in an upstairs tower with iron bars outside the window, to prevent their tumbling out into the moat.

'If I had been a bachelor,' said the baron sighing, 'I might have done it fifty times over, without being interrupted. Hallo! Put a flask of wine and the largest pipe in the little vaulted room behind the hall.'

'One of the domestics, in a very kind manner, executed the baron's order in the course of half an hour or so, and Von Koeldwethout being apprised thereof, strode to the vaulted room, the walls of which, being of dark shining wood, gleamed in the light of the blazing logs which were piled upon the hearth. The bottle and pipe were ready, and, upon the whole, the place looked very comfortable.

'Leave the lamp,' said the baron.

'Anything else, my lord?' inquired the domestic.

'The room,' replied the baron. The domestic obeyed, and the baron locked the door.

'I'll smoke a last pipe,' said the baron, 'and then I'll be off.' So, putting the knife upon the table till he wanted it, and tossing off a goodly measure of wine, the Lord of Grogzwig threw himself back in his chair, stretched his legs out before the fire, and puffed away.

'He thought about a great many things - about his present troubles and past days of bachelorship, and about the Lincoln greens, long since dispersed up and down the country, no one knew whither: with the exception of two who had been unfortunately beheaded, and four who had killed themselves with drinking. His mind was running upon bears and boars, when, in the process of draining his glass to the bottom, he raised his eyes, and saw, for the first time and with unbounded astonishment, that he was not alone.

'No, he was not; for, on the opposite side of the fire, there sat with folded arms a wrinkled hideous figure, with deeply sunk and bloodshot eyes, and an immensely long cadaverous face, shadowed by jagged and matted locks of coarse black hair. He wore a kind of tunic of a dull bluish colour, which, the baron observed, on regarding it

attentively, was clasped or ornamented down the front with coffin handles. His legs, too, were encased in coffin plates as though in armour; and over his left shoulder he wore a short dusky cloak, which seemed made of a remnant of some pall. He took no notice of the baron, but was intently eyeing the fire.

'Halloa!' said the baron, stamping his foot to attract attention.

'Halloa!' replied the stranger, moving his eyes towards the baron, but not his face or himself 'What now?'

'What now!' replied the baron, nothing daunted by his hollow voice and lustreless eyes. 'I should ask that question. How did you get here?'

'Through the door,' replied the figure.

'What are you?' says the baron.

'A man,' replied the figure.

'I don't believe it,' says the baron.

'Disbelieve it then,' says the figure.

'I will,' rejoined the baron.

The figure looked at the bold Baron of Grogzwig for some time, and then said familiarly,

'There's no coming over you, I see. I'm not a man!'

'What are you then?' asked the baron.

'A genius,' replied the figure.

'You don't look much like one,' returned the baron scornfully.

'I am the Genius of Despair and Suicide,' said the apparition. 'Now you know me.'

With these words the apparition turned towards the baron, as if composing himself for a talk - and, what was very remarkable, was, that he threw his cloak aside, and displaying a stake, which was run through the centre of his body, pulled it out with a jerk, and laid it on the table, as composedly as if it had been a walking-stick.

'Now,' said the figure, glancing at the hunting-knife, 'are you ready for me?'

'Not quite,' rejoined the baron; 'I must finish this pipe first.'

'Look sharp then,' said the figure.

'You seem in a hurry,' said the baron.

'Why, yes, I am,' answered the figure; 'they're doing a pretty brisk business in my way, over in England and France just now, and my time is a good deal taken up.'

'Do you drink?' said the baron, touching the bottle with the bowl of his pipe.

'Nine times out of ten, and then very hard,' rejoined the figure, drily.

'Never in moderation?' asked the baron.

'Never,' replied the figure, with a shudder, 'that breeds cheerfulness.'

The baron took another look at his new friend, whom he thought an uncommonly queer customer, and at length inquired whether he took any active part in such little proceedings as that which he had in contemplation.

'No,' replied the figure evasively; 'but I am always present.'

'Just to see fair, I suppose?' said the baron.

'Just that,' replied the figure, playing with his stake, and examining the ferule. 'Be as quick as you can, will you, for there's a young gentleman who is afflicted with too much money and leisure wanting me now, I find.'

'Going to kill himself because he has too much money!' exclaimed the baron, quite tickled. 'Ha! ha! that's a good one.' (This was the first time the baron had laughed for many a long day.)

'I say,' expostulated the figure, looking very much scared; 'don't do that again.'

'Why not?' demanded the baron.

'Because it gives me pain all over,' replied the figure. 'Sigh as much as you please: that does me good.'

'The baron sighed mechanically at the mention of the word; the figure, brightening up again, handed him the hunting-knife with most winning politeness.

'It's not a bad idea though,' said the baron, feeling the edge of the weapon; 'a man killing himself because he has too much money.'

'Pooh!' said the apparition, petulantly, 'no better than a man's killing himself because he has none or little.'

'Whether the genius unintentionally committed himself in saying this, or whether he thought the baron's mind was so thoroughly made up that it didn't matter what he said, I have no means of knowing. I only know that the baron stopped his hand, all of a sudden, opened his eyes wide, and looked as if quite a new light had come upon him for the first time.

'Why, certainly,' said Von Koeldwethout, 'nothing is too bad to be retrieved.'

'Except empty coffers,' cried the genius.

'Well; but they may be one day filled again,' said the baron.

'Scolding wives,' snarled the genius.

'Oh! They may be made quiet,' said the baron.

'Thirteen children,' shouted the genius.

'Can't all go wrong, surely,' said the baron.

'The genius was evidently growing very savage with the baron, for holding these opinions all at once; but he tried to laugh it off, and said if he would let him know when he had left off joking he should feel obliged to him.

'But I am not joking; I was never farther from it,' remonstrated the baron.

'Well, I am glad to hear that,' said the genius, looking very grim, 'because a joke, without any figure of speech, IS the death of me. Come! Quit this dreary world at once.'

'I don't know,' said the baron, playing with the knife; 'it's a dreary one certainly, but I don't think yours is much better, for you have not the appearance of being particularly comfortable. That puts me in mind -

what security have I, that I shall be any the better for going out of the world after all!' he cried, starting up; 'I never thought of that.'

'Dispatch,' cried the figure, gnashing his teeth.

'Keep off!' said the baron. 'I'll brood over miseries no longer, but put a good face on the matter, and try the fresh air and the bears again; and if that don't do, I'll talk to the baroness soundly, and cut the Von Swillenhagens dead.' With this the baron fell into his chair, and laughed so loud and boisterously, that the room rang with it.

'The figure fell back a pace or two, regarding the baron meanwhile with a look of intense terror, and when he had ceased, caught up the stake, plunged it violently into its body, uttered a frightful howl, and disappeared.

'Von Koeldwethout never saw it again. Having once made up his mind to action, he soon brought the baroness and the Von Swillenhagens to reason, and died many years afterwards: not a rich man that I am aware of, but certainly a happy one: leaving behind him a numerous family, who had been carefully educated in bear and boar-hunting under his own personal eye. And my advice to all men is, that if ever they become hipped and melancholy from similar causes (as very many men do), they look at both sides of the question, applying a magnifying-glass to the best one; and if they still feel tempted to retire without leave, that they smoke a large pipe and drink a full bottle first, and profit by the laudable example of the Baron of Grogzwig.'

'The fresh coach is ready, ladies and gentlemen, if you please,' said a new driver, looking in.

This intelligence caused the punch to be finished in a great hurry, and prevented any discussion relative to the last story. Mr Squeers was observed to draw the grey-headed gentleman on one side, and to ask a question with great apparent interest; it bore reference to the Five Sisters of York, and was, in fact, an inquiry whether he could inform him how much per annum the Yorkshire convents got in those days with their boarders.

The journey was then resumed. Nicholas fell asleep towards morning, and, when he awoke, found, with great regret, that, during his nap, both the Baron of Grogzwig and the grey-haired gentleman had got down and were gone. The day dragged on uncomfortably enough. At about six o'clock that night, he and Mr Squeers, and the little boys, and their united luggage, were all put down together at the George and New Inn, Greta Bridge.