

Chapter XIII

Nicholas varies the Monotony of Dothebys Hall by a most vigorous and remarkable proceeding, which leads to Consequences of some Importance

The cold, feeble dawn of a January morning was stealing in at the windows of the common sleeping-room, when Nicholas, raising himself on his arm, looked among the prostrate forms which on every side surrounded him, as though in search of some particular object.

It needed a quick eye to detect, from among the huddled mass of sleepers, the form of any given individual. As they lay closely packed together, covered, for warmth's sake, with their patched and ragged clothes, little could be distinguished but the sharp outlines of pale faces, over which the sombre light shed the same dull heavy colour; with, here and there, a gaunt arm thrust forth: its thinness hidden by no covering, but fully exposed to view, in all its shrunken ugliness. There were some who, lying on their backs with upturned faces and clenched hands, just visible in the leaden light, bore more the aspect of dead bodies than of living creatures; and there were others coiled up into strange and fantastic postures, such as might have been taken for the uneasy efforts of pain to gain some temporary relief, rather than the freaks of slumber. A few - and these were among the youngest of the children - slept peacefully on, with smiles upon their faces, dreaming perhaps of home; but ever and again a deep and heavy sigh, breaking the stillness of the room, announced that some new sleeper had awakened to the misery of another day; and, as morning took the place of night, the smiles gradually faded away, with the friendly darkness which had given them birth.

Dreams are the bright creatures of poem and legend, who sport on earth in the night season, and melt away in the first beam of the sun, which lights grim care and stern reality on their daily pilgrimage through the world.

Nicholas looked upon the sleepers; at first, with the air of one who gazes upon a scene which, though familiar to him, has lost none of its sorrowful effect in consequence; and, afterwards, with a more intense and searching scrutiny, as a man would who missed something his eye was accustomed to meet, and had expected to rest upon. He was still occupied in this search, and had half risen from his bed in the eagerness of his quest, when the voice of Squeers was heard, calling from the bottom of the stairs.

'Now then,' cried that gentleman, 'are you going to sleep all day, up there - '

'You lazy hounds?' added Mrs Squeers, finishing the sentence, and producing, at the same time, a sharp sound, like that which is occasioned by the lacing of stays.

'We shall be down directly, sir,' replied Nicholas.

'Down directly!' said Squeers. 'Ah! you had better be down directly, or I'll be down upon some of you in less. Where's that Smike?'

Nicholas looked hurriedly round again, but made no answer.

'Smike!' shouted Squeers.

'Do you want your head broke in a fresh place, Smike?' demanded his amiable lady in the same key.

Still there was no reply, and still Nicholas stared about him, as did the greater part of the boys, who were by this time roused.

'Confound his impudence!' muttered Squeers, rapping the stair-rail impatiently with his cane. 'Nickleby!'

'Well, sir.'

'Send that obstinate scoundrel down; don't you hear me calling?'

'He is not here, sir,' replied Nicholas.

'Don't tell me a lie,' retorted the schoolmaster. 'He is.'

'He is not,' retorted Nicholas angrily, 'don't tell me one.'

'We shall soon see that,' said Mr Squeers, rushing upstairs. 'I'll find him, I warrant you.'

With which assurance, Mr Squeers bounced into the dormitory, and, swinging his cane in the air ready for a blow, darted into the corner where the lean body of the drudge was usually stretched at night. The cane descended harmlessly upon the ground. There was nobody there.

'What does this mean?' said Squeers, turning round with a very pale face. 'Where have you hid him?'

'I have seen nothing of him since last night,' replied Nicholas.

'Come,' said Squeers, evidently frightened, though he endeavoured to look otherwise, 'you won't save him this way. Where is he?'

'At the bottom of the nearest pond for aught I know,' rejoined Nicholas in a low voice, and fixing his eyes full on the master's face.

'Damn you, what do you mean by that?' retorted Squeers in great perturbation. Without waiting for a reply, he inquired of the boys whether any one among them knew anything of their missing schoolmate.

There was a general hum of anxious denial, in the midst of which, one shrill voice was heard to say (as, indeed, everybody thought):

'Please, sir, I think Smike's run away, sir.'

'Ha!' cried Squeers, turning sharp round. 'Who said that?'

'Tomkins, please sir,' rejoined a chorus of voices. Mr Squeers made a plunge into the crowd, and at one dive, caught a very little boy, habited still in his night-gear, and the perplexed expression of whose countenance, as he was brought forward, seemed to intimate that he was as yet uncertain whether he was about to be punished or rewarded for the suggestion. He was not long in doubt.

'You think he has run away, do you, sir?' demanded Squeers.

'Yes, please sir,' replied the little boy.

'And what, sir,' said Squeers, catching the little boy suddenly by the arms and whisking up his drapery in a most dexterous manner, 'what reason have you to suppose that any boy would want to run away from this establishment? Eh, sir?'

The child raised a dismal cry, by way of answer, and Mr Squeers, throwing himself into the most favourable attitude for exercising his strength, beat him until the little urchin in his writhings actually rolled out of his hands, when he mercifully allowed him to roll away, as he best could.

'There,' said Squeers. 'Now if any other boy thinks Smike has run away, I shall be glad to have a talk with him.'

There was, of course, a profound silence, during which Nicholas showed his disgust as plainly as looks could show it.

'Well, Nickleby,' said Squeers, eyeing him maliciously. 'YOU think he has run away, I suppose?'

'I think it extremely likely,' replied Nicholas, in a quiet manner.

'Oh, you do, do you?' sneered Squeers. 'Maybe you know he has?'

'I know nothing of the kind.'

'He didn't tell you he was going, I suppose, did he?' sneered Squeers.

'He did not,' replied Nicholas; 'I am very glad he did not, for it would then have been my duty to have warned you in time.'

'Which no doubt you would have been devilish sorry to do,' said Squeers in a taunting fashion.

'I should indeed,' replied Nicholas. 'You interpret my feelings with great accuracy.'

Mrs Squeers had listened to this conversation, from the bottom of the stairs; but, now losing all patience, she hastily assumed her night-jacket, and made her way to the scene of action.

'What's all this here to-do?' said the lady, as the boys fell off right and left, to save her the trouble of clearing a passage with her brawny arms. 'What on earth are you a talking to him for, Squeery!'

'Why, my dear,' said Squeers, 'the fact is, that Smike is not to be found.'

'Well, I know that,' said the lady, 'and where's the wonder? If you get a parcel of proud-stomached teachers that set the young dogs a rebelling, what else can you look for? Now, young man, you just have the kindness to take yourself off to the schoolroom, and take the boys off with you, and don't you stir out of there till you have leave given you, or you and I may fall out in a way that'll spoil your beauty, handsome as you think yourself, and so I tell you.'

'Indeed!' said Nicholas.

'Yes; and indeed and indeed again, Mister Jackanapes,' said the excited lady; 'and I wouldn't keep such as you in the house another hour, if I had my way.'

'Nor would you if I had mine,' replied Nicholas. 'Now, boys!'

'Ah! Now, boys,' said Mrs Squeers, mimicking, as nearly as she could, the voice and manner of the usher. 'Follow your leader, boys, and take pattern by Smike if you dare. See what he'll get for himself, when he is brought back; and, mind! I tell you that you shall have as bad, and twice as bad, if you so much as open your mouths about him.'

'If I catch him,' said Squeers, 'I'll only stop short of flaying him alive. I give you notice, boys.'

'IF you catch him,' retorted Mrs Squeers, contemptuously; 'you are sure to; you can't help it, if you go the right way to work. Come! Away with you!'

With these words, Mrs Squeers dismissed the boys, and after a little light skirmishing with those in the rear who were pressing forward to get out of the way, but were detained for a few moments by the throng in front, succeeded in clearing the room, when she confronted her spouse alone.

'He is off,' said Mrs Squeers. 'The cow-house and stable are locked up, so he can't be there; and he's not downstairs anywhere, for the girl has looked. He must have gone York way, and by a public road too.'

'Why must he?' inquired Squeers.

'Stupid!' said Mrs Squeers angrily. 'He hadn't any money, had he?'

'Never had a penny of his own in his whole life, that I know of,' replied Squeers.

'To be sure,' rejoined Mrs Squeers, 'and he didn't take anything to eat with him; that I'll answer for. Ha! ha! ha!'

'Ha! ha! ha!' laughed Squeers.

'Then, of course,' said Mrs S., 'he must beg his way, and he could do that, nowhere, but on the public road.'

'That's true,' exclaimed Squeers, clapping his hands.

'True! Yes; but you would never have thought of it, for all that, if I hadn't said so,' replied his wife. 'Now, if you take the chaise and go one road, and I borrow Swallow's chaise, and go the other, what with keeping our eyes open, and asking questions, one or other of us is pretty certain to lay hold of him.'

The worthy lady's plan was adopted and put in execution without a moment's delay. After a very hasty breakfast, and the prosecution of some inquiries in the village, the result of which seemed to show that he was on the right track, Squeers started forth in the pony-chaise, intent upon discovery and vengeance. Shortly afterwards, Mrs Squeers, arrayed in the white top-coat, and tied up in various shawls and handkerchiefs, issued forth in another chaise and another direction, taking with her a good-sized bludgeon, several odd pieces of

strong cord, and a stout labouring man: all provided and carried upon the expedition, with the sole object of assisting in the capture, and (once caught) insuring the safe custody of the unfortunate Smike.

Nicholas remained behind, in a tumult of feeling, sensible that whatever might be the upshot of the boy's flight, nothing but painful and deplorable consequences were likely to ensue from it. Death, from want and exposure to the weather, was the best that could be expected from the protracted wandering of so poor and helpless a creature, alone and unfriended, through a country of which he was wholly ignorant. There was little, perhaps, to choose between this fate and a return to the tender mercies of the Yorkshire school; but the unhappy being had established a hold upon his sympathy and compassion, which made his heart ache at the prospect of the suffering he was destined to undergo. He lingered on, in restless anxiety, picturing a thousand possibilities, until the evening of next day, when Squeers returned, alone, and unsuccessful.

'No news of the scamp!' said the schoolmaster, who had evidently been stretching his legs, on the old principle, not a few times during the journey. 'I'll have consolation for this out of somebody, Nickleby, if Mrs Squeers don't hunt him down; so I give you warning.'

'It is not in my power to console you, sir,' said Nicholas. 'It is nothing to me.'

'Isn't it?' said Squeers in a threatening manner. 'We shall see!'

'We shall,' rejoined Nicholas.

'Here's the pony run right off his legs, and me obliged to come home with a hack cob, that'll cost fifteen shillings besides other expenses,' said Squeers; 'who's to pay for that, do you hear?'

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders and remained silent.

'I'll have it out of somebody, I tell you,' said Squeers, his usual harsh crafty manner changed to open bullying 'None of your whining vapourings here, Mr Puppy, but be off to your kennel, for it's past your bedtime! Come! Get out!'

Nicholas bit his lip and knit his hands involuntarily, for his fingerends tingled to avenge the insult; but remembering that the man was drunk, and that it could come to little but a noisy brawl, he contented himself with darting a contemptuous look at the tyrant, and walked, as majestically as he could, upstairs: not a little nettled, however, to observe that Miss Squeers and Master Squeers, and the servant girl, were enjoying the scene from a snug corner; the two former indulging

in many edifying remarks about the presumption of poor upstarts, which occasioned a vast deal of laughter, in which even the most miserable of all miserable servant girls joined: while Nicholas, stung to the quick, drew over his head such bedclothes as he had, and sternly resolved that the outstanding account between himself and Mr Squeers should be settled rather more speedily than the latter anticipated.

Another day came, and Nicholas was scarcely awake when he heard the wheels of a chaise approaching the house. It stopped. The voice of Mrs Squeers was heard, and in exultation, ordering a glass of spirits for somebody, which was in itself a sufficient sign that something extraordinary had happened. Nicholas hardly dared to look out of the window; but he did so, and the very first object that met his eyes was the wretched Smike: so bedabbled with mud and rain, so haggard and worn, and wild, that, but for his garments being such as no scarecrow was ever seen to wear, he might have been doubtful, even then, of his identity.

'Lift him out,' said Squeers, after he had literally feasted his eyes, in silence, upon the culprit. 'Bring him in; bring him in!'

'Take care,' cried Mrs Squeers, as her husband proffered his assistance. 'We tied his legs under the apron and made'em fast to the chaise, to prevent his giving us the slip again.'

With hands trembling with delight, Squeers unloosened the cord; and Smike, to all appearance more dead than alive, was brought into the house and securely locked up in a cellar, until such time as Mr Squeers should deem it expedient to operate upon him, in presence of the assembled school.

Upon a hasty consideration of the circumstances, it may be matter of surprise to some persons, that Mr and Mrs Squeers should have taken so much trouble to repossess themselves of an incumbrance of which it was their wont to complain so loudly; but their surprise will cease when they are informed that the manifold services of the drudge, if performed by anybody else, would have cost the establishment some ten or twelve shillings per week in the shape of wages; and furthermore, that all runaways were, as a matter of policy, made severe examples of, at Dotheboys Hall, inasmuch as, in consequence of the limited extent of its attractions, there was but little inducement, beyond the powerful impulse of fear, for any pupil, provided with the usual number of legs and the power of using them, to remain.

The news that Smike had been caught and brought back in triumph, ran like wild-fire through the hungry community, and expectation was on tiptoe all the morning. On tiptoe it was destined to remain,

however, until afternoon; when Squeers, having refreshed himself with his dinner, and further strengthened himself by an extra libation or so, made his appearance (accompanied by his amiable partner) with a countenance of portentous import, and a fearful instrument of flagellation, strong, supple, wax-ended, and new, - in short, purchased that morning, expressly for the occasion.

'Is every boy here?' asked Squeers, in a tremendous voice.

Every boy was there, but every boy was afraid to speak, so Squeers glared along the lines to assure himself; and every eye drooped, and every head cowered down, as he did so.

'Each boy keep his place,' said Squeers, administering his favourite blow to the desk, and regarding with gloomy satisfaction the universal start which it never failed to occasion. 'Nickleby! to your desk, sir.'

It was remarked by more than one small observer, that there was a very curious and unusual expression in the usher's face; but he took his seat, without opening his lips in reply. Squeers, casting a triumphant glance at his assistant and a look of most comprehensive despotism on the boys, left the room, and shortly afterwards returned, dragging Smike by the collar - or rather by that fragment of his jacket which was nearest the place where his collar would have been, had he boasted such a decoration.

In any other place, the appearance of the wretched, jaded, spiritless object would have occasioned a murmur of compassion and remonstrance. It had some effect, even there; for the lookers-on moved uneasily in their seats; and a few of the boldest ventured to steal looks at each other, expressive of indignation and pity.

They were lost on Squeers, however, whose gaze was fastened on the luckless Smike, as he inquired, according to custom in such cases, whether he had anything to say for himself.

'Nothing, I suppose?' said Squeers, with a diabolical grin.

Smike glanced round, and his eye rested, for an instant, on Nicholas, as if he had expected him to intercede; but his look was riveted on his desk.

'Have you anything to say?' demanded Squeers again: giving his right arm two or three flourishes to try its power and suppleness. 'Stand a little out of the way, Mrs Squeers, my dear; I've hardly got room enough.'

'Spare me, sir!' cried Smike.

'Oh! that's all, is it?' said Squeers. 'Yes, I'll flog you within an inch of your life, and spare you that.'

'Ha, ha, ha,' laughed Mrs Squeers, 'that's a good 'un!'

'I was driven to do it,' said Smike faintly; and casting another imploring look about him.

'Driven to do it, were you?' said Squeers. 'Oh! it wasn't your fault; it was mine, I suppose - eh?'

'A nasty, ungrateful, pig-headed, brutish, obstinate, sneaking dog,' exclaimed Mrs Squeers, taking Smike's head under her arm, and administering a cuff at every epithet; 'what does he mean by that?'

'Stand aside, my dear,' replied Squeers. 'We'll try and find out.'

Mrs Squeers, being out of breath with her exertions, complied. Squeers caught the boy firmly in his grip; one desperate cut had fallen on his body - he was wincing from the lash and uttering a scream of pain - it was raised again, and again about to fall - when Nicholas Nickleby, suddenly starting up, cried 'Stop!' in a voice that made the rafters ring.

'Who cried stop?' said Squeers, turning savagely round.

'I,' said Nicholas, stepping forward. 'This must not go on.'

'Must not go on!' cried Squeers, almost in a shriek.

'No!' thundered Nicholas.

Aghast and stupefied by the boldness of the interference, Squeers released his hold of Smike, and, falling back a pace or two, gazed upon Nicholas with looks that were positively frightful.

'I say must not,' repeated Nicholas, nothing daunted; 'shall not. I will prevent it.'

Squeers continued to gaze upon him, with his eyes starting out of his head; but astonishment had actually, for the moment, bereft him of speech.

'You have disregarded all my quiet interference in the miserable lad's behalf,' said Nicholas; 'you have returned no answer to the letter in which I begged forgiveness for him, and offered to be responsible that he would remain quietly here. Don't blame me for this public interference. You have brought it upon yourself; not I.'

'Sit down, beggar!' screamed Squeers, almost beside himself with rage, and seizing SMIKE as he spoke.

'Wretch,' rejoined Nicholas, fiercely, 'touch him at your peril! I will not stand by, and see it done. My blood is up, and I have the strength of ten such men as you. Look to yourself, for by Heaven I will not spare you, if you drive me on!'

'Stand back,' cried Squeers, brandishing his weapon.

'I have a long series of insults to avenge,' said Nicholas, flushed with passion; 'and my indignation is aggravated by the dastardly cruelties practised on helpless infancy in this foul den. Have a care; for if you do raise the devil within me, the consequences shall fall heavily upon your own head!'

He had scarcely spoken, when Squeers, in a violent outbreak of wrath, and with a cry like the howl of a wild beast, spat upon him, and struck him a blow across the face with his instrument of torture, which raised up a bar of livid flesh as it was inflicted. Smarting with the agony of the blow, and concentrating into that one moment all his feelings of rage, scorn, and indignation, Nicholas sprang upon him, wrested the weapon from his hand, and pinning him by the throat, beat the ruffian till he roared for mercy.

The boys - with the exception of Master Squeers, who, coming to his father's assistance, harassed the enemy in the rear - moved not, hand or foot; but Mrs Squeers, with many shrieks for aid, hung on to the tail of her partner's coat, and endeavoured to drag him from his infuriated adversary; while Miss Squeers, who had been peeping through the keyhole in expectation of a very different scene, darted in at the very beginning of the attack, and after launching a shower of inkstands at the usher's head, beat Nicholas to her heart's content; animating herself, at every blow, with the recollection of his having refused her proffered love, and thus imparting additional strength to an arm which (as she took after her mother in this respect) was, at no time, one of the weakest.

Nicholas, in the full torrent of his violence, felt the blows no more than if they had been dealt with feathers; but, becoming tired of the noise and uproar, and feeling that his arm grew weak besides, he threw all his remaining strength into half-a-dozen finishing cuts, and flung Squeers from him with all the force he could muster. The violence of his fall precipitated Mrs Squeers completely over an adjacent form; and Squeers striking his head against it in his descent, lay at his full length on the ground, stunned and motionless.

Having brought affairs to this happy termination, and ascertained, to his thorough satisfaction, that Squeers was only stunned, and not dead (upon which point he had had some unpleasant doubts at first), Nicholas left his family to restore him, and retired to consider what course he had better adopt. He looked anxiously round for Smike, as he left the room, but he was nowhere to be seen.

After a brief consideration, he packed up a few clothes in a small leathern valise, and, finding that nobody offered to oppose his progress, marched boldly out by the front-door, and shortly afterwards, struck into the road which led to Greta Bridge.

When he had cooled sufficiently to be enabled to give his present circumstances some little reflection, they did not appear in a very encouraging light; he had only four shillings and a few pence in his pocket, and was something more than two hundred and fifty miles from London, whither he resolved to direct his steps, that he might ascertain, among other things, what account of the morning's proceedings Mr Squeers transmitted to his most affectionate uncle.

Lifting up his eyes, as he arrived at the conclusion that there was no remedy for this unfortunate state of things, he beheld a horseman coming towards him, whom, on nearer approach, he discovered, to his infinite chagrin, to be no other than Mr John Browdie, who, clad in cords and leather leggings, was urging his animal forward by means of a thick ash stick, which seemed to have been recently cut from some stout sapling.

'I am in no mood for more noise and riot,' thought Nicholas, 'and yet, do what I will, I shall have an altercation with this honest blockhead, and perhaps a blow or two from yonder staff.'

In truth, there appeared some reason to expect that such a result would follow from the encounter, for John Browdie no sooner saw Nicholas advancing, than he reined in his horse by the footpath, and waited until such time as he should come up; looking meanwhile, very sternly between the horse's ears, at Nicholas, as he came on at his leisure.

'Servant, young genelman,' said John.

'Yours,' said Nicholas.

'Weel; we ha' met at last,' observed John, making the stirrup ring under a smart touch of the ash stick.

'Yes,' replied Nicholas, hesitating. 'Come!' he said, frankly, after a moment's pause, 'we parted on no very good terms the last time we

met; it was my fault, I believe; but I had no intention of offending you, and no idea that I was doing so. I was very sorry for it, afterwards. Will you shake hands?'

'Shake honds!' cried the good-humoured Yorkshireman; 'ah! that I weel;' at the same time, he bent down from the saddle, and gave Nicholas's fist a huge wrench: 'but wa'at be the matther wi' thy feace, mun? it be all brokken loike.'

'It is a cut,' said Nicholas, turning scarlet as he spoke, - 'a blow; but I returned it to the giver, and with good interest too.'

'Noa, did 'ee though?' exclaimed John Browdie. 'Well deane! I loike 'un for thot.'

'The fact is,' said Nicholas, not very well knowing how to make the avowal, 'the fact is, that I have been ill-treated.'

'Noa!' interposed John Browdie, in a tone of compassion; for he was a giant in strength and stature, and Nicholas, very likely, in his eyes, seemed a mere dwarf; 'dean't say thot.'

'Yes, I have,' replied Nicholas, 'by that man Squeers, and I have beaten him soundly, and am leaving this place in consequence.'

'What!' cried John Browdie, with such an ecstatic shout, that the horse quite shied at it. 'Beatten the schoolmeasther! Ho! ho! ho! Beatten the schoolmeasther! who ever heard o' the loike o' that noo! Giv' us thee hond agean, yoongster. Beatten the schoolmeasther! Dang it, I loov' thee for't.'

With these expressions of delight, John Browdie laughed and laughed again - so loud that the echoes, far and wide, sent back nothing but jovial peals of merriment - and shook Nicholas by the hand meanwhile, no less heartily. When his mirth had subsided, he inquired what Nicholas meant to do; on his informing him, to go straight to London, he shook his head doubtfully, and inquired if he knew how much the coaches charged to carry passengers so far.

'No, I do not,' said Nicholas; 'but it is of no great consequence to me, for I intend walking.'

'Gang awa' to Lunnun afoot!' cried John, in amazement.

'Every step of the way,' replied Nicholas. 'I should be many steps further on by this time, and so goodbye!'

'Nay noo,' replied the honest countryman, reining in his impatient horse, 'stan' still, tellee. Hoo much cash hast thee gotten?'

'Not much,' said Nicholas, colouring, 'but I can make it enough. Where there's a will, there's a way, you know.'

John Browdie made no verbal answer to this remark, but putting his hand in his pocket, pulled out an old purse of solid leather, and insisted that Nicholas should borrow from him whatever he required for his present necessities.

'Dean't be afeard, mun,' he said; 'tak' eneaf to carry thee whoam. Thee'lt pay me yan day, a' warrant.'

Nicholas could by no means be prevailed upon to borrow more than a sovereign, with which loan Mr Browdie, after many entreaties that he would accept of more (observing, with a touch of Yorkshire caution, that if he didn't spend it all, he could put the surplus by, till he had an opportunity of remitting it carriage free), was fain to content himself.

'Tak' that bit o' timber to help thee on wi', mun,' he added, pressing his stick on Nicholas, and giving his hand another squeeze; 'keep a good heart, and bless thee. Beaten the schoolmeaster! 'Cod it's the best thing a've heerd this twonty year!'

So saying, and indulging, with more delicacy than might have been expected from him, in another series of loud laughs, for the purpose of avoiding the thanks which Nicholas poured forth, John Browdie set spurs to his horse, and went off at a smart canter: looking back, from time to time, as Nicholas stood gazing after him, and waving his hand cheerily, as if to encourage him on his way. Nicholas watched the horse and rider until they disappeared over the brow of a distant hill, and then set forward on his journey.

He did not travel far that afternoon, for by this time it was nearly dark, and there had been a heavy fall of snow, which not only rendered the way toilsome, but the track uncertain and difficult to find, after daylight, save by experienced wayfarers. He lay, that night, at a cottage, where beds were let at a cheap rate to the more humble class of travellers; and, rising betimes next morning, made his way before night to Boroughbridge. Passing through that town in search of some cheap resting-place, he stumbled upon an empty barn within a couple of hundred yards of the roadside; in a warm corner of which, he stretched his weary limbs, and soon fell asleep.

When he awoke next morning, and tried to recollect his dreams, which had been all connected with his recent sojourn at Dotheboys Hall, he

sat up, rubbed his eyes and stared - not with the most composed countenance possible - at some motionless object which seemed to be stationed within a few yards in front of him.

'Strange!' cried Nicholas; 'can this be some lingering creation of the visions that have scarcely left me! It cannot be real - and yet I - I am awake! Smike!'

The form moved, rose, advanced, and dropped upon its knees at his feet. It was Smike indeed.

'Why do you kneel to me?' said Nicholas, hastily raising him.

'To go with you - anywhere - everywhere - to the world's end - to the churchyard grave,' replied Smike, clinging to his hand. 'Let me, oh do let me. You are my home - my kind friend - take me with you, pray.'

'I am a friend who can do little for you,' said Nicholas, kindly. 'How came you here?'

He had followed him, it seemed; had never lost sight of him all the way; had watched while he slept, and when he halted for refreshment; and had feared to appear before, lest he should be sent back. He had not intended to appear now, but Nicholas had awakened more suddenly than he looked for, and he had had no time to conceal himself.

'Poor fellow!' said Nicholas, 'your hard fate denies you any friend but one, and he is nearly as poor and helpless as yourself.'

'May I - may I go with you?' asked Smike, timidly. 'I will be your faithful hard-working servant, I will, indeed. I want no clothes,' added the poor creature, drawing his rags together; 'these will do very well. I only want to be near you.'

'And you shall,' cried Nicholas. 'And the world shall deal by you as it does by me, till one or both of us shall quit it for a better. Come!'

With these words, he strapped his burden on his shoulders, and, taking his stick in one hand, extended the other to his delighted charge; and so they passed out of the old barn, together.