

Chapter XXV

Concerning a young Lady from London, who joins the Company, and an elderly Admirer who follows in her Train; with an affecting Ceremony consequent on their Arrival

The new piece being a decided hit, was announced for every evening of performance until further notice, and the evenings when the theatre was closed, were reduced from three in the week to two. Nor were these the only tokens of extraordinary success; for, on the succeeding Saturday, Nicholas received, by favour of the indefatigable Mrs Grudden, no less a sum than thirty shillings; besides which substantial reward, he enjoyed considerable fame and honour: having a presentation copy of Mr Curdle's pamphlet forwarded to the theatre, with that gentleman's own autograph (in itself an inestimable treasure) on the fly-leaf, accompanied with a note, containing many expressions of approval, and an unsolicited assurance that Mr Curdle would be very happy to read Shakespeare to him for three hours every morning before breakfast during his stay in the town.

'I've got another novelty, Johnson,' said Mr Crummles one morning in great glee.

'What's that?' rejoined Nicholas. 'The pony?'

'No, no, we never come to the pony till everything else has failed,' said Mr Crummles. 'I don't think we shall come to the pony at all, this season. No, no, not the pony.'

'A boy phenomenon, perhaps?' suggested Nicholas.

'There is only one phenomenon, sir,' replied Mr Crummles impressively, 'and that's a girl.'

'Very true,' said Nicholas. 'I beg your pardon. Then I don't know what it is, I am sure.'

'What should you say to a young lady from London?' inquired Mr Crummles. 'Miss So-and-so, of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane?'

'I should say she would look very well in the bills,' said Nicholas.

'You're about right there,' said Mr Crummles; 'and if you had said she would look very well upon the stage too, you wouldn't have been far out. Look here; what do you think of this?'

With this inquiry Mr Crummles unfolded a red poster, and a blue poster, and a yellow poster, at the top of each of which public

notification was inscribed in enormous characters - 'First appearance of the unrivalled Miss Petowker of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane!'

'Dear me!' said Nicholas, 'I know that lady.'

'Then you are acquainted with as much talent as was ever compressed into one young person's body,' retorted Mr Crummles, rolling up the bills again; 'that is, talent of a certain sort - of a certain sort. 'The Blood Drinker,' added Mr Crummles with a prophetic sigh, 'The Blood Drinker' will die with that girl; and she's the only sylph I ever saw, who could stand upon one leg, and play the tambourine on her other knee, LIKE a sylph.'

'When does she come down?' asked Nicholas.

'We expect her today,' replied Mr Crummles. 'She is an old friend of Mrs Crummles's. Mrs Crummles saw what she could do - always knew it from the first. She taught her, indeed, nearly all she knows. Mrs Crummles was the original Blood Drinker.'

'Was she, indeed?'

'Yes. She was obliged to give it up though.'

'Did it disagree with her?' asked Nicholas.

'Not so much with her, as with her audiences,' replied Mr Crummles. 'Nobody could stand it. It was too tremendous. You don't quite know what Mrs Crummles is yet.'

Nicholas ventured to insinuate that he thought he did.

'No, no, you don't,' said Mr Crummles; 'you don't, indeed. I don't, and that's a fact. I don't think her country will, till she is dead. Some new proof of talent bursts from that astonishing woman every year of her life. Look at her - mother of six children - three of 'em alive, and all upon the stage!'

'Extraordinary!' cried Nicholas.

'Ah! extraordinary indeed,' rejoined Mr Crummles, taking a complacent pinch of snuff, and shaking his head gravely. 'I pledge you my professional word I didn't even know she could dance, till her last benefit, and then she played Juliet, and Helen Macgregor, and did the skipping-rope hornpipe between the pieces. The very first time I saw that admirable woman, Johnson,' said Mr Crummles, drawing a little nearer, and speaking in the tone of confidential friendship, 'she stood

upon her head on the butt-end of a spear, surrounded with blazing fireworks.'

'You astonish me!' said Nicholas.

'SHE astonished ME!' returned Mr Crummles, with a very serious countenance. 'Such grace, coupled with such dignity! I adored her from that moment!'

The arrival of the gifted subject of these remarks put an abrupt termination to Mr Crummles's eulogium. Almost immediately afterwards, Master Percy Crummles entered with a letter, which had arrived by the General Post, and was directed to his gracious mother; at sight of the superscription whereof, Mrs Crummles exclaimed, 'From Henrietta Petowker, I do declare!' and instantly became absorbed in the contents.

'Is it - ?' inquired Mr Crummles, hesitating.

'Oh, yes, it's all right,' replied Mrs Crummles, anticipating the question. 'What an excellent thing for her, to be sure!'

'It's the best thing altogether, that I ever heard of, I think,' said Mr Crummles; and then Mr Crummles, Mrs Crummles, and Master Percy Crummles, all fell to laughing violently. Nicholas left them to enjoy their mirth together, and walked to his lodgings; wondering very much what mystery connected with Miss Petowker could provoke such merriment, and pondering still more on the extreme surprise with which that lady would regard his sudden enlistment in a profession of which she was such a distinguished and brilliant ornament.

But, in this latter respect he was mistaken; for - whether Mr Vincent Crummles had paved the way, or Miss Petowker had some special reason for treating him with even more than her usual amiability - their meeting at the theatre next day was more like that of two dear friends who had been inseparable from infancy, than a recognition passing between a lady and gentleman who had only met some half-dozen times, and then by mere chance. Nay, Miss Petowker even whispered that she had wholly dropped the Kenwigses in her conversations with the manager's family, and had represented herself as having encountered Mr Johnson in the very first and most fashionable circles; and on Nicholas receiving this intelligence with unfeigned surprise, she added, with a sweet glance, that she had a claim on his good nature now, and might tax it before long.

Nicholas had the honour of playing in a slight piece with Miss Petowker that night, and could not but observe that the warmth of her reception was mainly attributable to a most persevering umbrella in

the upper boxes; he saw, too, that the enchanting actress cast many sweet looks towards the quarter whence these sounds proceeded; and that every time she did so, the umbrella broke out afresh. Once, he thought that a peculiarly shaped hat in the same corner was not wholly unknown to him; but, being occupied with his share of the stage business, he bestowed no great attention upon this circumstance, and it had quite vanished from his memory by the time he reached home.

He had just sat down to supper with Smike, when one of the people of the house came outside the door, and announced that a gentleman below stairs wished to speak to Mr Johnson.

'Well, if he does, you must tell him to come up; that's all I know,' replied Nicholas. 'One of our hungry brethren, I suppose, Smike.'

His fellow-lodger looked at the cold meat in silent calculation of the quantity that would be left for dinner next day, and put back a slice he had cut for himself, in order that the visitor's encroachments might be less formidable in their effects.

'It is not anybody who has been here before,' said Nicholas, 'for he is tumbling up every stair. Come in, come in. In the name of wonder! Mr Lillyvick?'

It was, indeed, the collector of water-rates who, regarding Nicholas with a fixed look and immovable countenance, shook hands with most portentous solemnity, and sat himself down in a seat by the chimney-corner.

'Why, when did you come here?' asked Nicholas.

'This morning, sir,' replied Mr Lillyvick.

'Oh! I see; then you were at the theatre tonight, and it was your umb -'

'This umbrella,' said Mr Lillyvick, producing a fat green cotton one with a battered ferrule. 'What did you think of that performance?'

'So far as I could judge, being on the stage,' replied Nicholas, 'I thought it very agreeable.'

'Agreeable!' cried the collector. 'I mean to say, sir, that it was delicious.'

Mr Lillyvick bent forward to pronounce the last word with greater emphasis; and having done so, drew himself up, and frowned and nodded a great many times.

'I say, delicious,' repeated Mr Lillyvick. 'Absorbing, fairy-like, toomultuous,' and again Mr Lillyvick drew himself up, and again he frowned and nodded.

'Ah!' said Nicholas, a little surprised at these symptoms of ecstatic approbation. 'Yes - she is a clever girl.'

'She is a divinity,' returned Mr Lillyvick, giving a collector's double knock on the ground with the umbrella before-mentioned. 'I have known divine actresses before now, sir, I used to collect - at least I used to CALL for - and very often call for - the water-rate at the house of a divine actress, who lived in my beat for upwards of four year but never - no, never, sir of all divine creatures, actresses or no actresses, did I see a diviner one than is Henrietta Petowker.'

Nicholas had much ado to prevent himself from laughing; not trusting himself to speak, he merely nodded in accordance with Mr Lillyvick's nods, and remained silent.

'Let me speak a word with you in private,' said Mr Lillyvick.

Nicholas looked good-humouredly at Smike, who, taking the hint, disappeared.

'A bachelor is a miserable wretch, sir,' said Mr Lillyvick.

'Is he?' asked Nicholas.

'He is,' rejoined the collector. 'I have lived in the world for nigh sixty year, and I ought to know what it is.'

'You OUGHT to know, certainly,' thought Nicholas; 'but whether you do or not, is another question.'

'If a bachelor happens to have saved a little matter of money,' said Mr Lillyvick, 'his sisters and brothers, and nephews and nieces, look TO that money, and not to him; even if, by being a public character, he is the head of the family, or, as it may be, the main from which all the other little branches are turned on, they still wish him dead all the while, and get low-spirited every time they see him looking in good health, because they want to come into his little property. You see that?'

'Oh yes,' replied Nicholas: 'it's very true, no doubt.'

'The great reason for not being married,' resumed Mr Lillyvick, 'is the expense; that's what's kept me off, or else - Lord!' said Mr Lillyvick, snapping his fingers, 'I might have had fifty women.'

'Fine women?' asked Nicholas.

'Fine women, sir!' replied the collector; 'ay! not so fine as Henrietta Petowker, for she is an uncommon specimen, but such women as don't fall into every man's way, I can tell you. Now suppose a man can get a fortune IN a wife instead of with her - eh?'

'Why, then, he's a lucky fellow,' replied Nicholas.

'That's what I say,' retorted the collector, patting him benignantly on the side of the head with his umbrella; 'just what I say. Henrietta Petowker, the talented Henrietta Petowker has a fortune in herself, and I am going to - '

'To make her Mrs Lillyvick?' suggested Nicholas.

'No, sir, not to make her Mrs Lillyvick,' replied the collector. 'Actresses, sir, always keep their maiden names - that's the regular thing - but I'm going to marry her; and the day after tomorrow, too.'

'I congratulate you, sir,' said Nicholas.

'Thank you, sir,' replied the collector, buttoning his waistcoat. 'I shall draw her salary, of course, and I hope after all that it's nearly as cheap to keep two as it is to keep one; that's a consolation.'

'Surely you don't want any consolation at such a moment?' observed Nicholas.

'No,' replied Mr Lillyvick, shaking his head nervously: 'no - of course not.'

'But how come you both here, if you're going to be married, Mr Lillyvick?' asked Nicholas.

'Why, that's what I came to explain to you,' replied the collector of water-rate. 'The fact is, we have thought it best to keep it secret from the family.'

'Family!' said Nicholas. 'What family?'

'The Kenwigses of course,' rejoined Mr Lillyvick. 'If my niece and the children had known a word about it before I came away, they'd have gone into fits at my feet, and never have come out of 'em till I took an

oath not to marry anybody - or they'd have got out a commission of lunacy, or some dreadful thing,' said the collector, quite trembling as he spoke.

'To be sure,' said Nicholas. 'Yes; they would have been jealous, no doubt.'

'To prevent which,' said Mr Lillyvick, 'Henrietta Petowker (it was settled between us) should come down here to her friends, the Crummleses, under pretence of this engagement, and I should go down to Guildford the day before, and join her on the coach there, which I did, and we came down from Guildford yesterday together. Now, for fear you should be writing to Mr Noggs, and might say anything about us, we have thought it best to let you into the secret. We shall be married from the Crummleses' lodgings, and shall be delighted to see you - either before church or at breakfast-time, which you like. It won't be expensive, you know,' said the collector, highly anxious to prevent any misunderstanding on this point; 'just muffins and coffee, with perhaps a shrimp or something of that sort for a relish, you know.' 'Yes, yes, I understand,' replied Nicholas. 'Oh, I shall be most happy to come; it will give me the greatest pleasure. Where's the lady stopping - with Mrs Crummles?'

'Why, no,' said the collector; 'they couldn't very well dispose of her at night, and so she is staying with an acquaintance of hers, and another young lady; they both belong to the theatre.'

'Miss Snevellicci, I suppose?' said Nicholas.

'Yes, that's the name.'

'And they'll be bridesmaids, I presume?' said Nicholas.

'Why,' said the collector, with a rueful face, 'they WILL have four bridesmaids; I'm afraid they'll make it rather theatrical.'

'Oh no, not at all,' replied Nicholas, with an awkward attempt to convert a laugh into a cough. 'Who may the four be? Miss Snevellicci of course - Miss Ledrook - '

'The - the phenomenon,' groaned the collector.

'Ha, ha!' cried Nicholas. 'I beg your pardon, I don't know what I'm laughing at - yes, that'll be very pretty - the phenomenon - who else?'

'Some young woman or other,' replied the collector, rising; 'some other friend of Henrietta Petowker's. Well, you'll be careful not to say anything about it, will you?'

'You may safely depend upon me,' replied Nicholas. 'Won't you take anything to eat or drink?'

'No,' said the collector; 'I haven't any appetite. I should think it was a very pleasant life, the married one, eh?'

'I have not the least doubt of it,' rejoined Nicholas.

'Yes,' said the collector; 'certainly. Oh yes. No doubt. Good night.'

With these words, Mr Lillyvick, whose manner had exhibited through the whole of this interview a most extraordinary compound of precipitation, hesitation, confidence and doubt, fondness, misgiving, meanness, and self-importance, turned his back upon the room, and left Nicholas to enjoy a laugh by himself if he felt so disposed.

Without stopping to inquire whether the intervening day appeared to Nicholas to consist of the usual number of hours of the ordinary length, it may be remarked that, to the parties more directly interested in the forthcoming ceremony, it passed with great rapidity, insomuch that when Miss Petowker awoke on the succeeding morning in the chamber of Miss Snellicci, she declared that nothing should ever persuade her that that really was the day which was to behold a change in her condition.

'I never will believe it,' said Miss Petowker; 'I cannot really. It's of no use talking, I never can make up my mind to go through with such a trial!'

On hearing this, Miss Snellicci and Miss Ledrook, who knew perfectly well that their fair friend's mind had been made up for three or four years, at any period of which time she would have cheerfully undergone the desperate trial now approaching if she could have found any eligible gentleman disposed for the venture, began to preach comfort and firmness, and to say how very proud she ought to feel that it was in her power to confer lasting bliss on a deserving object, and how necessary it was for the happiness of mankind in general that women should possess fortitude and resignation on such occasions; and that although for their parts they held true happiness to consist in a single life, which they would not willingly exchange - no, not for any worldly consideration - still (thank God), if ever the time SHOULD come, they hoped they knew their duty too well to repine, but would the rather submit with meekness and humility of spirit to a fate for which Providence had clearly designed them with a view to the contentment and reward of their fellow-creatures.

'I might feel it was a great blow,' said Miss Snellicci, 'to break up old associations and what-do-you-callems of that kind, but I would submit, my dear, I would indeed.'

'So would I,' said Miss Ledrook; 'I would rather court the yoke than shun it. I have broken hearts before now, and I'm very sorry for it: for it's a terrible thing to reflect upon.'

'It is indeed,' said Miss Snellicci. 'Now Led, my dear, we must positively get her ready, or we shall be too late, we shall indeed.'

This pious reasoning, and perhaps the fear of being too late, supported the bride through the ceremony of robing, after which, strong tea and brandy were administered in alternate doses as a means of strengthening her feeble limbs and causing her to walk steadier.

'How do you feel now, my love?' inquired Miss Snellicci.

'Oh Lillyvick!' cried the bride. 'If you knew what I am undergoing for you!'

'Of course he knows it, love, and will never forget it,' said Miss Ledrook.

'Do you think he won't?' cried Miss Petowker, really showing great capability for the stage. 'Oh, do you think he won't? Do you think Lillyvick will always remember it - always, always, always?'

There is no knowing in what this burst of feeling might have ended, if Miss Snellicci had not at that moment proclaimed the arrival of the fly, which so astounded the bride that she shook off divers alarming symptoms which were coming on very strong, and running to the glass adjusted her dress, and calmly declared that she was ready for the sacrifice.

She was accordingly supported into the coach, and there 'kept up' (as Miss Snellicci said) with perpetual sniffs of SAL VOLATILE and sips of brandy and other gentle stimulants, until they reached the manager's door, which was already opened by the two Master Crumleses, who wore white cockades, and were decorated with the choicest and most resplendent waistcoats in the theatrical wardrobe. By the combined exertions of these young gentlemen and the bridesmaids, assisted by the coachman, Miss Petowker was at length supported in a condition of much exhaustion to the first floor, where she no sooner encountered the youthful bridegroom than she fainted with great decorum.

'Henrietta Petowker!' said the collector; 'cheer up, my lovely one.'

Miss Petowker grasped the collector's hand, but emotion choked her utterance.

'Is the sight of me so dreadful, Henrietta Petowker?' said the collector.

'Oh no, no, no,' rejoined the bride; 'but all the friends - the darling friends - of my youthful days - to leave them all - it is such a shock!'

With such expressions of sorrow, Miss Petowker went on to enumerate the dear friends of her youthful days one by one, and to call upon such of them as were present to come and embrace her. This done, she remembered that Mrs Crummles had been more than a mother to her, and after that, that Mr Crummles had been more than a father to her, and after that, that the Master Crummleses and Miss Ninetta Crummles had been more than brothers and sisters to her. These various remembrances being each accompanied with a series of hugs, occupied a long time, and they were obliged to drive to church very fast, for fear they should be too late.

The procession consisted of two files; in the first of which were Miss Bravassa (the fourth bridesmaid), Mrs Crummles, the collector, and Mr Folair, who had been chosen as his second on the occasion. In the other were the bride, Mr Crummles, Miss Snellicci, Miss Ledrook, and the phenomenon. The costumes were beautiful. The bridesmaids were quite covered with artificial flowers, and the phenomenon, in particular, was rendered almost invisible by the portable arbour in which she was enshrined. Miss Ledrook, who was of a romantic turn, wore in her breast the miniature of some field-officer unknown, which she had purchased, a great bargain, not very long before; the other ladies displayed several dazzling articles of imitative jewellery, almost equal to real, and Mrs Crummles came out in a stern and gloomy majesty, which attracted the admiration of all beholders.

But, perhaps the appearance of Mr Crummles was more striking and appropriate than that of any member of the party. This gentleman, who personated the bride's father, had, in pursuance of a happy and original conception, 'made up' for the part by arraying himself in a theatrical wig, of a style and pattern commonly known as a brown George, and moreover assuming a snuff-coloured suit, of the previous century, with grey silk stockings, and buckles to his shoes. The better to support his assumed character he had determined to be greatly overcome, and, consequently, when they entered the church, the sobs of the affectionate parent were so heart-rending that the pew-opener suggested the propriety of his retiring to the vestry, and comforting himself with a glass of water before the ceremony began.

The procession up the aisle was beautiful. The bride, with the four bridesmaids, forming a group previously arranged and rehearsed; the collector, followed by his second, imitating his walk and gestures to the indescribable amusement of some theatrical friends in the gallery; Mr Crummles, with an infirm and feeble gait; Mrs Crummles advancing with that stage walk, which consists of a stride and a stop alternately - it was the completest thing ever witnessed. The ceremony was very quickly disposed of, and all parties present having signed the register (for which purpose, when it came to his turn, Mr Crummles carefully wiped and put on an immense pair of spectacles), they went back to breakfast in high spirits. And here they found Nicholas awaiting their arrival.

'Now then,' said Crummles, who had been assisting Mrs Grudden in the preparations, which were on a more extensive scale than was quite agreeable to the collector. 'Breakfast, breakfast.'

No second invitation was required. The company crowded and squeezed themselves at the table as well as they could, and fell to, immediately: Miss Petowker blushing very much when anybody was looking, and eating very much when anybody was NOT looking; and Mr Lillyvick going to work as though with the cool resolve, that since the good things must be paid for by him, he would leave as little as possible for the Crummleses to eat up afterwards.

'It's very soon done, sir, isn't it?' inquired Mr Folair of the collector, leaning over the table to address him.

'What is soon done, sir?' returned Mr Lillyvick.

'The tying up - the fixing oneself with a wife,' replied Mr Folair. 'It don't take long, does it?'

'No, sir,' replied Mr Lillyvick, colouring. 'It does not take long. And what then, sir?'

'Oh! nothing,' said the actor. 'It don't take a man long to hang himself, either, eh? ha, ha!'

Mr Lillyvick laid down his knife and fork, and looked round the table with indignant astonishment.

'To hang himself!' repeated Mr Lillyvick.

A profound silence came upon all, for Mr Lillyvick was dignified beyond expression.

'To hang himself!' cried Mr Lillyvick again. 'Is any parallel attempted to be drawn in this company between matrimony and hanging?'

'The noose, you know,' said Mr Folair, a little crest-fallen.

'The noose, sir?' retorted Mr Lillyvick. 'Does any man dare to speak to me of a noose, and Henrietta Pe - '

'Lillyvick,' suggested Mr Crummles.

' - And Henrietta Lillyvick in the same breath?' said the collector. 'In this house, in the presence of Mr and Mrs Crummles, who have brought up a talented and virtuous family, to be blessings and phenomenons, and what not, are we to hear talk of nooses?'

'Folair,' said Mr Crummles, deeming it a matter of decency to be affected by this allusion to himself and partner, 'I'm astonished at you.'

'What are you going on in this way at me for?' urged the unfortunate actor. 'What have I done?'

'Done, sir!' cried Mr Lillyvick, 'aimed a blow at the whole framework of society - '

'And the best and tenderest feelings,' added Crummles, relapsing into the old man.

'And the highest and most estimable of social ties,' said the collector. 'Noose! As if one was caught, trapped into the married state, pinned by the leg, instead of going into it of one's own accord and glorying in the act!'

'I didn't mean to make it out, that you were caught and trapped, and pinned by the leg,' replied the actor. 'I'm sorry for it; I can't say any more.'

'So you ought to be, sir,' returned Mr Lillyvick; 'and I am glad to hear that you have enough of feeling left to be so.'

The quarrel appearing to terminate with this reply, Mrs Lillyvick considered that the fittest occasion (the attention of the company being no longer distracted) to burst into tears, and require the assistance of all four bridesmaids, which was immediately rendered, though not without some confusion, for the room being small and the table-cloth long, a whole detachment of plates were swept off the board at the very first move. Regardless of this circumstance, however, Mrs Lillyvick refused to be comforted until the belligerents

had passed their words that the dispute should be carried no further, which, after a sufficient show of reluctance, they did, and from that time Mr Folair sat in moody silence, contenting himself with pinching Nicholas's leg when anything was said, and so expressing his contempt both for the speaker and the sentiments to which he gave utterance.

There were a great number of speeches made; some by Nicholas, and some by Crummles, and some by the collector; two by the Master Crummles in returning thanks for themselves, and one by the phenomenon on behalf of the bridesmaids, at which Mrs Crummles shed tears. There was some singing, too, from Miss Ledrook and Miss Bravassa, and very likely there might have been more, if the fly-driver, who stopped to drive the happy pair to the spot where they proposed to take steamboat to Ryde, had not sent in a peremptory message intimating, that if they didn't come directly he should infallibly demand eighteen-pence over and above his agreement.

This desperate threat effectually broke up the party. After a most pathetic leave-taking, Mr Lillyvick and his bride departed for Ryde, where they were to spend the next two days in profound retirement, and whither they were accompanied by the infant, who had been appointed travelling bridesmaid on Mr Lillyvick's express stipulation: as the steamboat people, deceived by her size, would (he had previously ascertained) transport her at half-price.

As there was no performance that night, Mr Crummles declared his intention of keeping it up till everything to drink was disposed of; but Nicholas having to play Romeo for the first time on the ensuing evening, contrived to slip away in the midst of a temporary confusion, occasioned by the unexpected development of strong symptoms of inebriety in the conduct of Mrs Grudden.

To this act of desertion he was led, not only by his own inclinations, but by his anxiety on account of Smike, who, having to sustain the character of the Apothecary, had been as yet wholly unable to get any more of the part into his head than the general idea that he was very hungry, which - perhaps from old recollections - he had acquired with great aptitude.

'I don't know what's to be done, Smike,' said Nicholas, laying down the book. 'I am afraid you can't learn it, my poor fellow.'

'I am afraid not,' said Smike, shaking his head. 'I think if you - but that would give you so much trouble.'

'What?' inquired Nicholas. 'Never mind me.'

'I think,' said Smike, 'if you were to keep saying it to me in little bits, over and over again, I should be able to recollect it from hearing you.'

'Do you think so?' exclaimed Nicholas. 'Well said. Let us see who tires first. Not I, Smike, trust me. Now then. Who calls so loud?'

'Who calls so loud?' said Smike.

'Who calls so loud?' repeated Nicholas.

'Who calls so loud?' cried Smike.

Thus they continued to ask each other who called so loud, over and over again; and when Smike had that by heart Nicholas went to another sentence, and then to two at a time, and then to three, and so on, until at midnight poor Smike found to his unspeakable joy that he really began to remember something about the text.

Early in the morning they went to it again, and Smike, rendered more confident by the progress he had already made, got on faster and with better heart. As soon as he began to acquire the words pretty freely, Nicholas showed him how he must come in with both hands spread out upon his stomach, and how he must occasionally rub it, in compliance with the established form by which people on the stage always denote that they want something to eat. After the morning's rehearsal they went to work again, nor did they stop, except for a hasty dinner, until it was time to repair to the theatre at night.

Never had master a more anxious, humble, docile pupil. Never had pupil a more patient, unwearying, considerate, kindhearted master.

As soon as they were dressed, and at every interval when he was not upon the stage, Nicholas renewed his instructions. They prospered well. The Romeo was received with hearty plaudits and unbounded favour, and Smike was pronounced unanimously, alike by audience and actors, the very prince and prodigy of Apothecaries.