

Chapter XXVII

Mrs Nickleby becomes acquainted with Messrs Pyke and Pluck, whose Affection and Interest are beyond all Bounds

Mrs Nickleby had not felt so proud and important for many a day, as when, on reaching home, she gave herself wholly up to the pleasant visions which had accompanied her on her way thither. Lady Mulberry Hawk - that was the prevalent idea. Lady Mulberry Hawk! - On Tuesday last, at St George's, Hanover Square, by the Right Reverend the Bishop of Llandaff, Sir Mulberry Hawk, of Mulberry Castle, North Wales, to Catherine, only daughter of the late Nicholas Nickleby, Esquire, of Devonshire. 'Upon my word!' cried Mrs Nicholas Nickleby, 'it sounds very well.'

Having dispatched the ceremony, with its attendant festivities, to the perfect satisfaction of her own mind, the sanguine mother pictured to her imagination a long train of honours and distinctions which could not fail to accompany Kate in her new and brilliant sphere. She would be presented at court, of course. On the anniversary of her birthday, which was upon the nineteenth of July ('at ten minutes past three o'clock in the morning,' thought Mrs Nickleby in a parenthesis, 'for I recollect asking what o'clock it was'), Sir Mulberry would give a great feast to all his tenants, and would return them three and a half per cent on the amount of their last half-year's rent, as would be fully described and recorded in the fashionable intelligence, to the immeasurable delight and admiration of all the readers thereof. Kate's picture, too, would be in at least half-a-dozen of the annuals, and on the opposite page would appear, in delicate type, 'Lines on contemplating the Portrait of Lady Mulberry Hawk. By Sir Dingleby Dabber.' Perhaps some one annual, of more comprehensive design than its fellows, might even contain a portrait of the mother of Lady Mulberry Hawk, with lines by the father of Sir Dingleby Dabber. More unlikely things had come to pass. Less interesting portraits had appeared. As this thought occurred to the good lady, her countenance unconsciously assumed that compound expression of simpering and sleepiness which, being common to all such portraits, is perhaps one reason why they are always so charming and agreeable.

With such triumphs of aerial architecture did Mrs Nickleby occupy the whole evening after her accidental introduction to Ralph's titled friends; and dreams, no less prophetic and equally promising, haunted her sleep that night. She was preparing for her frugal dinner next day, still occupied with the same ideas - a little softened down perhaps by sleep and daylight - when the girl who attended her, partly for company, and partly to assist in the household affairs, rushed into the room in unwonted agitation, and announced that two gentlemen were waiting in the passage for permission to walk upstairs.

'Bless my heart!' cried Mrs Nickleby, hastily arranging her cap and front, 'if it should be - dear me, standing in the passage all this time - why don't you go and ask them to walk up, you stupid thing?'

While the girl was gone on this errand, Mrs Nickleby hastily swept into a cupboard all vestiges of eating and drinking; which she had scarcely done, and seated herself with looks as collected as she could assume, when two gentlemen, both perfect strangers, presented themselves.

'How do you DO?' said one gentleman, laying great stress on the last word of the inquiry.

'HOW do you do?' said the other gentleman, altering the emphasis, as if to give variety to the salutation.

Mrs Nickleby curtsied and smiled, and curtsied again, and remarked, rubbing her hands as she did so, that she hadn't the - really - the honour to -

'To know us,' said the first gentleman. 'The loss has been ours, Mrs Nickleby. Has the loss been ours, Pyke?'

'It has, Pluck,' answered the other gentleman.

'We have regretted it very often, I believe, Pyke?' said the first gentleman.

'Very often, Pluck,' answered the second.

'But now,' said the first gentleman, 'now we have the happiness we have pined and languished for. Have we pined and languished for this happiness, Pyke, or have we not?'

'You know we have, Pluck,' said Pyke, reproachfully.

'You hear him, ma'am?' said Mr Pluck, looking round; 'you hear the unimpeachable testimony of my friend Pyke - that reminds me, - formalities, formalities, must not be neglected in civilised society. Pyke - Mrs Nickleby.'

Mr Pyke laid his hand upon his heart, and bowed low.

'Whether I shall introduce myself with the same formality,' said Mr Pluck - 'whether I shall say myself that my name is Pluck, or whether I shall ask my friend Pyke (who being now regularly introduced, is competent to the office) to state for me, Mrs Nickleby, that my name is Pluck; whether I shall claim your acquaintance on the plain ground of the strong interest I take in your welfare, or whether I shall make

myself known to you as the friend of Sir Mulberry Hawk - these, Mrs Nickleby, are considerations which I leave to you to determine.'

'Any friend of Sir Mulberry Hawk's requires no better introduction to me,' observed Mrs Nickleby, graciously.

'It is delightful to hear you say so,' said Mr Pluck, drawing a chair close to Mrs Nickleby, and sitting himself down. 'It is refreshing to know that you hold my excellent friend, Sir Mulberry, in such high esteem. A word in your ear, Mrs Nickleby. When Sir Mulberry knows it, he will be a happy man - I say, Mrs Nickleby, a happy man. Pyke, be seated.'

'MY good opinion,' said Mrs Nickleby, and the poor lady exulted in the idea that she was marvellously sly, - 'my good opinion can be of very little consequence to a gentleman like Sir Mulberry.'

'Of little consequence!' exclaimed Mr Pluck. 'Pyke, of what consequence to our friend, Sir Mulberry, is the good opinion of Mrs Nickleby?'

'Of what consequence?' echoed Pyke.

'Ay,' repeated Pluck; 'is it of the greatest consequence?'

'Of the very greatest consequence,' replied Pyke.

'Mrs Nickleby cannot be ignorant,' said Mr Pluck, 'of the immense impression which that sweet girl has - '

'Pluck!' said his friend, 'beware!'

'Pyke is right,' muttered Mr Pluck, after a short pause; 'I was not to mention it. Pyke is very right. Thank you, Pyke.'

'Well now, really,' thought Mrs Nickleby within herself. 'Such delicacy as that, I never saw!'

Mr Pluck, after feigning to be in a condition of great embarrassment for some minutes, resumed the conversation by entreating Mrs Nickleby to take no heed of what he had inadvertently said - to consider him imprudent, rash, injudicious. The only stipulation he would make in his own favour was, that she should give him credit for the best intentions.

'But when,' said Mr Pluck, 'when I see so much sweetness and beauty on the one hand, and so much ardour and devotion on the other, I -

pardon me, Pyke, I didn't intend to resume that theme. Change the subject, Pyke.'

'We promised Sir Mulberry and Lord Frederick,' said Pyke, 'that we'd call this morning and inquire whether you took any cold last night.'

'Not the least in the world last night, sir,' replied Mrs Nickleby, 'with many thanks to his lordship and Sir Mulberry for doing me the honour to inquire; not the least - which is the more singular, as I really am very subject to colds, indeed - very subject. I had a cold once,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'I think it was in the year eighteen hundred and seventeen; let me see, four and five are nine, and - yes, eighteen hundred and seventeen, that I thought I never should get rid of; actually and seriously, that I thought I never should get rid of. I was only cured at last by a remedy that I don't know whether you ever happened to hear of, Mr Pluck. You have a gallon of water as hot as you can possibly bear it, with a pound of salt, and sixpen'orth of the finest bran, and sit with your head in it for twenty minutes every night just before going to bed; at least, I don't mean your head - your feet. It's a most extraordinary cure - a most extraordinary cure. I used it for the first time, I recollect, the day after Christmas Day, and by the middle of April following the cold was gone. It seems quite a miracle when you come to think of it, for I had it ever since the beginning of September.'

'What an afflicting calamity!' said Mr Pyke.

'Perfectly horrid!' exclaimed Mr Pluck.

'But it's worth the pain of hearing, only to know that Mrs Nickleby recovered it, isn't it, Pluck?' cried Mr Pyke.

'That is the circumstance which gives it such a thrilling interest,' replied Mr Pluck.

'But come,' said Pyke, as if suddenly recollecting himself; 'we must not forget our mission in the pleasure of this interview. We come on a mission, Mrs Nickleby.'

'On a mission,' exclaimed that good lady, to whose mind a definite proposal of marriage for Kate at once presented itself in lively colours.

'From Sir Mulberry,' replied Pyke. 'You must be very dull here.'

'Rather dull, I confess,' said Mrs Nickleby.

'We bring the compliments of Sir Mulberry Hawk, and a thousand entreaties that you'll take a seat in a private box at the play tonight,' said Mr Pluck.

'Oh dear!' said Mrs Nickleby, 'I never go out at all, never.'

'And that is the very reason, my dear Mrs Nickleby, why you should go out tonight,' retorted Mr Pluck. 'Pyke, entreat Mrs Nickleby.'

'Oh, pray do,' said Pyke.

'You positively must,' urged Pluck.

'You are very kind,' said Mrs Nickleby, hesitating; 'but - '

'There's not a but in the case, my dear Mrs Nickleby,' remonstrated Mr Pluck; 'not such a word in the vocabulary. Your brother-in-law joins us, Lord Frederick joins us, Sir Mulberry joins us, Pyke joins us - a refusal is out of the question. Sir Mulberry sends a carriage for you - twenty minutes before seven to the moment - you'll not be so cruel as to disappoint the whole party, Mrs Nickleby?'

'You are so very pressing, that I scarcely know what to say,' replied the worthy lady.

'Say nothing; not a word, not a word, my dearest madam,' urged Mr Pluck. 'Mrs Nickleby,' said that excellent gentleman, lowering his voice, 'there is the most trifling, the most excusable breach of confidence in what I am about to say; and yet if my friend Pyke there overheard it - such is that man's delicate sense of honour, Mrs Nickleby - he'd have me out before dinner-time.'

Mrs Nickleby cast an apprehensive glance at the warlike Pyke, who had walked to the window; and Mr Pluck, squeezing her hand, went on:

'Your daughter has made a conquest - a conquest on which I may congratulate you. Sir Mulberry, my dear ma'am, Sir Mulberry is her devoted slave. Hem!'

'Hah!' cried Mr Pyke at this juncture, snatching something from the chimney-piece with a theatrical air. 'What is this! what do I behold!'

'What DO you behold, my dear fellow?' asked Mr Pluck.

'It is the face, the countenance, the expression,' cried Mr Pyke, falling into his chair with a miniature in his hand; 'feebly portrayed,

imperfectly caught, but still THE face, THE countenance, THE expression.'

'I recognise it at this distance!' exclaimed Mr Pluck in a fit of enthusiasm. 'Is it not, my dear madam, the faint similitude of - '

'It is my daughter's portrait,' said Mrs Nickleby, with great pride. And so it was. And little Miss La Creevy had brought it home for inspection only two nights before.

Mr Pyke no sooner ascertained that he was quite right in his conjecture, than he launched into the most extravagant encomiums of the divine original; and in the warmth of his enthusiasm kissed the picture a thousand times, while Mr Pluck pressed Mrs Nickleby's hand to his heart, and congratulated her on the possession of such a daughter, with so much earnestness and affection, that the tears stood, or seemed to stand, in his eyes. Poor Mrs Nickleby, who had listened in a state of enviable complacency at first, became at length quite overpowered by these tokens of regard for, and attachment to, the family; and even the servant girl, who had peeped in at the door, remained rooted to the spot in astonishment at the ecstasies of the two friendly visitors.

By degrees these raptures subsided, and Mrs Nickleby went on to entertain her guests with a lament over her fallen fortunes, and a picturesque account of her old house in the country: comprising a full description of the different apartments, not forgetting the little store-room, and a lively recollection of how many steps you went down to get into the garden, and which way you turned when you came out at the parlour door, and what capital fixtures there were in the kitchen. This last reflection naturally conducted her into the wash-house, where she stumbled upon the brewing utensils, among which she might have wandered for an hour, if the mere mention of those implements had not, by an association of ideas, instantly reminded Mr Pyke that he was 'amazing thirsty.'

'And I'll tell you what,' said Mr Pyke; 'if you'll send round to the public-house for a pot of milk half-and-half, positively and actually I'll drink it.'

And positively and actually Mr Pyke DID drink it, and Mr Pluck helped him, while Mrs Nickleby looked on in divided admiration of the condescension of the two, and the aptitude with which they accommodated themselves to the pewter-pot; in explanation of which seeming marvel it may be here observed, that gentlemen who, like Messrs Pyke and Pluck, live upon their wits (or not so much, perhaps, upon the presence of their own wits as upon the absence of wits in other people) are occasionally reduced to very narrow shifts and

straits, and are at such periods accustomed to regale themselves in a very simple and primitive manner.

'At twenty minutes before seven, then,' said Mr Pyke, rising, 'the coach will be here. One more look - one little look - at that sweet face. Ah! here it is. Unmoved, unchanged!' This, by the way, was a very remarkable circumstance, miniatures being liable to so many changes of expression - 'Oh, Pluck! Pluck!'

Mr Pluck made no other reply than kissing Mrs Nickleby's hand with a great show of feeling and attachment; Mr Pyke having done the same, both gentlemen hastily withdrew.

Mrs Nickleby was commonly in the habit of giving herself credit for a pretty tolerable share of penetration and acuteness, but she had never felt so satisfied with her own sharp-sightedness as she did that day. She had found it all out the night before. She had never seen Sir Mulberry and Kate together - never even heard Sir Mulberry's name - and yet hadn't she said to herself from the very first, that she saw how the case stood? and what a triumph it was, for there was now no doubt about it. If these flattering attentions to herself were not sufficient proofs, Sir Mulberry's confidential friend had suffered the secret to escape him in so many words. 'I am quite in love with that dear Mr Pluck, I declare I am,' said Mrs Nickleby.

There was one great source of uneasiness in the midst of this good fortune, and that was the having nobody by, to whom she could confide it. Once or twice she almost resolved to walk straight to Miss La Creevy's and tell it all to her. 'But I don't know,' thought Mrs Nickleby; 'she is a very worthy person, but I am afraid too much beneath Sir Mulberry's station for us to make a companion of. Poor thing!' Acting upon this grave consideration she rejected the idea of taking the little portrait painter into her confidence, and contented herself with holding out sundry vague and mysterious hopes of preferment to the servant girl, who received these obscure hints of dawning greatness with much veneration and respect.

Punctual to its time came the promised vehicle, which was no hackney coach, but a private chariot, having behind it a footman, whose legs, although somewhat large for his body, might, as mere abstract legs, have set themselves up for models at the Royal Academy. It was quite exhilarating to hear the clash and bustle with which he banged the door and jumped up behind after Mrs Nickleby was in; and as that good lady was perfectly unconscious that he applied the gold-headed end of his long stick to his nose, and so telegraphed most disrespectfully to the coachman over her very head, she sat in a state of much stiffness and dignity, not a little proud of her position.

At the theatre entrance there was more banging and more bustle, and there were also Messrs Pyke and Pluck waiting to escort her to her box; and so polite were they, that Mr Pyke threatened with many oaths to 'smifligate' a very old man with a lantern who accidentally stumbled in her way - to the great terror of Mrs Nickleby, who, conjecturing more from Mr Pyke's excitement than any previous acquaintance with the etymology of the word that smifligation and bloodshed must be in the main one and the same thing, was alarmed beyond expression, lest something should occur. Fortunately, however, Mr Pyke confined himself to mere verbal smifligation, and they reached their box with no more serious interruption by the way, than a desire on the part of the same pugnacious gentleman to 'smash' the assistant box-keeper for happening to mistake the number.

Mrs Nickleby had scarcely been put away behind the curtain of the box in an armchair, when Sir Mulberry and Lord Verisopht arrived, arrayed from the crowns of their heads to the tips of their gloves, and from the tips of their gloves to the toes of their boots, in the most elegant and costly manner. Sir Mulberry was a little hoarser than on the previous day, and Lord Verisopht looked rather sleepy and queer; from which tokens, as well as from the circumstance of their both being to a trifling extent unsteady upon their legs, Mrs Nickleby justly concluded that they had taken dinner.

'We have been - we have been - toasting your lovely daughter, Mrs Nickleby,' whispered Sir Mulberry, sitting down behind her.

'Oh, ho!' thought that knowing lady; 'wine in, truth out. - You are very kind, Sir Mulberry.'

'No, no upon my soul!' replied Sir Mulberry Hawk. 'It's you that's kind, upon my soul it is. It was so kind of you to come tonight.'

'So very kind of you to invite me, you mean, Sir Mulberry,' replied Mrs Nickleby, tossing her head, and looking prodigiously sly.

'I am so anxious to know you, so anxious to cultivate your good opinion, so desirous that there should be a delicious kind of harmonious family understanding between us,' said Sir Mulberry, 'that you mustn't think I'm disinterested in what I do. I'm infernal selfish; I am - upon my soul I am.'

'I am sure you can't be selfish, Sir Mulberry!' replied Mrs Nickleby. 'You have much too open and generous a countenance for that.'

'What an extraordinary observer you are!' said Sir Mulberry Hawk.

'Oh no, indeed, I don't see very far into things, Sir Mulberry,' replied Mrs Nickleby, in a tone of voice which left the baronet to infer that she saw very far indeed.

'I am quite afraid of you,' said the baronet. 'Upon my soul,' repeated Sir Mulberry, looking round to his companions; 'I am afraid of Mrs Nickleby. She is so immensely sharp.'

Messrs Pyke and Pluck shook their heads mysteriously, and observed together that they had found that out long ago; upon which Mrs Nickleby tittered, and Sir Mulberry laughed, and Pyke and Pluck roared.

'But where's my brother-in-law, Sir Mulberry?' inquired Mrs Nickleby. 'I shouldn't be here without him. I hope he's coming.'

'Pyke,' said Sir Mulberry, taking out his toothpick and lolling back in his chair, as if he were too lazy to invent a reply to this question. 'Where's Ralph Nickleby?'

'Pluck,' said Pyke, imitating the baronet's action, and turning the lie over to his friend, 'where's Ralph Nickleby?'

Mr Pluck was about to return some evasive reply, when the hustle caused by a party entering the next box seemed to attract the attention of all four gentlemen, who exchanged glances of much meaning. The new party beginning to converse together, Sir Mulberry suddenly assumed the character of a most attentive listener, and implored his friends not to breathe - not to breathe.

'Why not?' said Mrs Nickleby. 'What is the matter?'

'Hush!' replied Sir Mulberry, laying his hand on her arm. 'Lord Frederick, do you recognise the tones of that voice?'

'Deyvle take me if I didn't think it was the voice of Miss Nickleby.'

'Lor, my lord!' cried Miss Nickleby's mama, thrusting her head round the curtain. 'Why actually - Kate, my dear, Kate.'

'YOU here, mama! Is it possible!'

'Possible, my dear? Yes.'

'Why who - who on earth is that you have with you, mama?' said Kate, shrinking back as she caught sight of a man smiling and kissing his hand.

'Who do you suppose, my dear?' replied Mrs Nickleby, bending towards Mrs Witterly, and speaking a little louder for that lady's edification. 'There's Mr Pyke, Mr Pluck, Sir Mulberry Hawk, and Lord Frederick Verisopht.'

'Gracious Heaven!' thought Kate hurriedly. 'How comes she in such society?'

Now, Kate thought thus SO hurriedly, and the surprise was so great, and moreover brought back so forcibly the recollection of what had passed at Ralph's delectable dinner, that she turned extremely pale and appeared greatly agitated, which symptoms being observed by Mrs Nickleby, were at once set down by that acute lady as being caused and occasioned by violent love. But, although she was in no small degree delighted by this discovery, which reflected so much credit on her own quickness of perception, it did not lessen her motherly anxiety in Kate's behalf; and accordingly, with a vast quantity of trepidation, she quitted her own box to hasten into that of Mrs Witterly. Mrs Witterly, keenly alive to the glory of having a lord and a baronet among her visiting acquaintance, lost no time in signing to Mr Witterly to open the door, and thus it was that in less than thirty seconds Mrs Nickleby's party had made an irruption into Mrs Witterly's box, which it filled to the very door, there being in fact only room for Messrs Pyke and Pluck to get in their heads and waistcoats.

'My dear Kate,' said Mrs Nickleby, kissing her daughter affectionately. 'How ill you looked a moment ago! You quite frightened me, I declare!'

'It was mere fancy, mama, - the - the - reflection of the lights perhaps,' replied Kate, glancing nervously round, and finding it impossible to whisper any caution or explanation.

'Don't you see Sir Mulberry Hawk, my dear?'

Kate bowed slightly, and biting her lip turned her head towards the stage.

But Sir Mulberry Hawk was not to be so easily repulsed, for he advanced with extended hand; and Mrs Nickleby officiously informing Kate of this circumstance, she was obliged to extend her own. Sir Mulberry detained it while he murmured a profusion of compliments, which Kate, remembering what had passed between them, rightly considered as so many aggravations of the insult he had already put upon her. Then followed the recognition of Lord Verisopht, and then the greeting of Mr Pyke, and then that of Mr Pluck, and finally, to complete the young lady's mortification, she was compelled at Mrs Witterly's request to perform the ceremony of introducing the odious

persons, whom she regarded with the utmost indignation and abhorrence.

'Mrs Witterly is delighted,' said Mr Witterly, rubbing his hands; 'delighted, my lord, I am sure, with this opportunity of contracting an acquaintance which, I trust, my lord, we shall improve. Julia, my dear, you must not allow yourself to be too much excited, you must not. Indeed you must not. Mrs Witterly is of a most excitable nature, Sir Mulberry. The snuff of a candle, the wick of a lamp, the bloom on a peach, the down on a butterfly. You might blow her away, my lord; you might blow her away.'

Sir Mulberry seemed to think that it would be a great convenience if the lady could be blown away. He said, however, that the delight was mutual, and Lord Verisopht added that it was mutual, whereupon Messrs Pyke and Pluck were heard to murmur from the distance that it was very mutual indeed.

'I take an interest, my lord,' said Mrs Witterly, with a faint smile, 'such an interest in the drama.'

'Ye - es. It's very interesting,' replied Lord Verisopht.

'I'm always ill after Shakespeare,' said Mrs Witterly. 'I scarcely exist the next day; I find the reaction so very great after a tragedy, my lord, and Shakespeare is such a delicious creature.'

'Ye - es!' replied Lord Verisopht. 'He was a clayver man.'

'Do you know, my lord,' said Mrs Witterly, after a long silence, 'I find I take so much more interest in his plays, after having been to that dear little dull house he was born in! Were you ever there, my lord?'

'No, nayver,' replied Verisopht.

'Then really you ought to go, my lord,' returned Mrs Witterly, in very languid and drawling accents. 'I don't know how it is, but after you've seen the place and written your name in the little book, somehow or other you seem to be inspired; it kindles up quite a fire within one.'

'Ye - es!' replied Lord Verisopht, 'I shall certainly go there.'

'Julia, my life,' interposed Mr Witterly, 'you are deceiving his lordship - unintentionally, my lord, she is deceiving you. It is your poetical temperament, my dear - your ethereal soul - your fervid imagination, which throws you into a glow of genius and excitement. There is nothing in the place, my dear - nothing, nothing.'

'I think there must be something in the place,' said Mrs Nickleby, who had been listening in silence; 'for, soon after I was married, I went to Stratford with my poor dear Mr Nickleby, in a post-chaise from Birmingham - was it a post-chaise though?' said Mrs Nickleby, considering; 'yes, it must have been a post-chaise, because I recollect remarking at the time that the driver had a green shade over his left eye; - in a post-chaise from Birmingham, and after we had seen Shakespeare's tomb and birthplace, we went back to the inn there, where we slept that night, and I recollect that all night long I dreamt of nothing but a black gentleman, at full length, in plaster-of-Paris, with a lay-down collar tied with two tassels, leaning against a post and thinking; and when I woke in the morning and described him to Mr Nickleby, he said it was Shakespeare just as he had been when he was alive, which was very curious indeed. Stratford - Stratford,' continued Mrs Nickleby, considering. 'Yes, I am positive about that, because I recollect I was in the family way with my son Nicholas at the time, and I had been very much frightened by an Italian image boy that very morning. In fact, it was quite a mercy, ma'am,' added Mrs Nickleby, in a whisper to Mrs Witterly, 'that my son didn't turn out to be a Shakespeare, and what a dreadful thing that would have been!'

When Mrs Nickleby had brought this interesting anecdote to a close, Pyke and Pluck, ever zealous in their patron's cause, proposed the adjournment of a detachment of the party into the next box; and with so much skill were the preliminaries adjusted, that Kate, despite all she could say or do to the contrary, had no alternative but to suffer herself to be led away by Sir Mulberry Hawk. Her mother and Mr Pluck accompanied them, but the worthy lady, pluming herself upon her discretion, took particular care not so much as to look at her daughter during the whole evening, and to seem wholly absorbed in the jokes and conversation of Mr Pluck, who, having been appointed sentry over Mrs Nickleby for that especial purpose, neglected, on his side, no possible opportunity of engrossing her attention.

Lord Frederick Verisopht remained in the next box to be talked to by Mrs Witterly, and Mr Pyke was in attendance to throw in a word or two when necessary. As to Mr Witterly, he was sufficiently busy in the body of the house, informing such of his friends and acquaintance as happened to be there, that those two gentlemen upstairs, whom they had seen in conversation with Mrs W., were the distinguished Lord Frederick Verisopht and his most intimate friend, the gay Sir Mulberry Hawk - a communication which inflamed several respectable house-keepers with the utmost jealousy and rage, and reduced sixteen unmarried daughters to the very brink of despair.

The evening came to an end at last, but Kate had yet to be handed downstairs by the detested Sir Mulberry; and so skilfully were the manoeuvres of Messrs Pyke and Pluck conducted, that she and the

baronet were the last of the party, and were even - without an appearance of effort or design - left at some little distance behind.

'Don't hurry, don't hurry,' said Sir Mulberry, as Kate hastened on, and attempted to release her arm.

She made no reply, but still pressed forward.

'Nay, then - ' coolly observed Sir Mulberry, stopping her outright.

'You had best not seek to detain me, sir!' said Kate, angrily.

'And why not?' retorted Sir Mulberry. 'My dear creature, now why do you keep up this show of displeasure?'

'SHOW!' repeated Kate, indignantly. 'How dare you presume to speak to me, sir - to address me - to come into my presence?'

'You look prettier in a passion, Miss Nickleby,' said Sir Mulberry Hawk, stooping down, the better to see her face.

'I hold you in the bitterest detestation and contempt, sir,' said Kate. 'If you find any attraction in looks of disgust and aversion, you - let me rejoin my friends, sir, instantly. Whatever considerations may have withheld me thus far, I will disregard them all, and take a course that even YOU might feel, if you do not immediately suffer me to proceed.'

Sir Mulberry smiled, and still looking in her face and retaining her arm, walked towards the door.

'If no regard for my sex or helpless situation will induce you to desist from this coarse and unmanly persecution,' said Kate, scarcely knowing, in the tumult of her passions, what she said, - 'I have a brother who will resent it dearly, one day.'

'Upon my soul!' exclaimed Sir Mulberry, as though quietly communing with himself; passing his arm round her waist as he spoke, 'she looks more beautiful, and I like her better in this mood, than when her eyes are cast down, and she is in perfect repose!'

How Kate reached the lobby where her friends were waiting she never knew, but she hurried across it without at all regarding them, and disengaged herself suddenly from her companion, sprang into the coach, and throwing herself into its darkest corner burst into tears.

Messrs Pyke and Pluck, knowing their cue, at once threw the party into great commotion by shouting for the carriages, and getting up a violent quarrel with sundry inoffensive bystanders; in the midst of

which tumult they put the affrighted Mrs Nickleby in her chariot, and having got her safely off, turned their thoughts to Mrs Witterly, whose attention also they had now effectually distracted from the young lady, by throwing her into a state of the utmost bewilderment and consternation. At length, the conveyance in which she had come rolled off too with its load, and the four worthies, being left alone under the portico, enjoyed a hearty laugh together.

'There,' said Sir Mulberry, turning to his noble friend. 'Didn't I tell you last night that if we could find where they were going by bribing a servant through my fellow, and then established ourselves close by with the mother, these people's honour would be our own? Why here it is, done in four-and-twenty hours.'

'Ye - es,' replied the dupe. 'But I have been tied to the old woman all ni-ight.'

'Hear him,' said Sir Mulberry, turning to his two friends. 'Hear this discontented grumbler. Isn't it enough to make a man swear never to help him in his plots and schemes again? Isn't it an infernal shame?'

Pyke asked Pluck whether it was not an infernal shame, and Pluck asked Pyke; but neither answered.

'Isn't it the truth?' demanded Verisopht. 'Wasn't it so?'

'Wasn't it so!' repeated Sir Mulberry. 'How would you have had it? How could we have got a general invitation at first sight - come when you like, go when you like, stop as long as you like, do what you like - if you, the lord, had not made yourself agreeable to the foolish mistress of the house? Do I care for this girl, except as your friend? Haven't I been sounding your praises in her ears, and bearing her pretty sulks and peevishness all night for you? What sort of stuff do you think I'm made of? Would I do this for every man? Don't I deserve even gratitude in return?'

'You're a deyvlish good fellow,' said the poor young lord, taking his friend's arm. 'Upon my life you're a deyvlish good fellow, Hawk.'

'And I have done right, have I?' demanded Sir Mulberry.

'Quite ri-ght.'

'And like a poor, silly, good-natured, friendly dog as I am, eh?'

'Ye - es, ye - es; like a friend,' replied the other.

'Well then,' replied Sir Mulberry, 'I'm satisfied. And now let's go and have our revenge on the German baron and the Frenchman, who cleaned you out so handsomely last night.'

With these words the friendly creature took his companion's arm and led him away, turning half round as he did so, and bestowing a wink and a contemptuous smile on Messrs Pyke and Pluck, who, cramming their handkerchiefs into their mouths to denote their silent enjoyment of the whole proceedings, followed their patron and his victim at a little distance.