Chapter XXV

Smike becomes known to Mrs Nickleby and Kate. Nicholas also meets with new Acquaintances. Brighter Days seem to dawn upon the Family

Having established his mother and sister in the apartments of the kind-hearted miniature painter, and ascertained that Sir Mulberry Hawk was in no danger of losing his life, Nicholas turned his thoughts to poor Smike, who, after breakfasting with Newman Noggs, had remained, in a disconsolate state, at that worthy creature's lodgings, waiting, with much anxiety, for further intelligence of his protector.

'As he will be one of our own little household, wherever we live, or whatever fortune is in reserve for us,' thought Nicholas, 'I must present the poor fellow in due form. They will be kind to him for his own sake, and if not (on that account solely) to the full extent I could wish, they will stretch a point, I am sure, for mine.'

Nicholas said 'they', but his misgivings were confined to one person. He was sure of Kate, but he knew his mother's peculiarities, and was not quite so certain that Smike would find favour in the eyes of Mrs Nickleby.

'However,' thought Nicholas as he departed on his benevolent errand; 'she cannot fail to become attached to him, when she knows what a devoted creature he is, and as she must quickly make the discovery, his probation will be a short one.'

'I was afraid,' said Smike, overjoyed to see his friend again, 'that you had fallen into some fresh trouble; the time seemed so long, at last, that I almost feared you were lost.'

'Lost!' replied Nicholas gaily. 'You will not be rid of me so easily, I promise you. I shall rise to the surface many thousand times yet, and the harder the thrust that pushes me down, the more quickly I shall rebound, Smike. But come; my errand here is to take you home.'

'Home!' faltered Smike, drawing timidly back.

'Ay,' rejoined Nicholas, taking his arm. 'Why not?'

'I had such hopes once,' said Smike; 'day and night, day and night, for many years. I longed for home till I was weary, and pined away with grief, but now - '

'And what now?' asked Nicholas, looking kindly in his face. 'What now, old friend?'

'I could not part from you to go to any home on earth,' replied Smike, pressing his hand; 'except one, except one. I shall never be an old man; and if your hand placed me in the grave, and I could think, before I died, that you would come and look upon it sometimes with one of your kind smiles, and in the summer weather, when everything was alive - not dead like me - I could go to that home almost without a tear.'

'Why do you talk thus, poor boy, if your life is a happy one with me?' said Nicholas.

'Because I should change; not those about me. And if they forgot me, I should never know it,' replied Smike. 'In the churchyard we are all alike, but here there are none like me. I am a poor creature, but I know that.'

'You are a foolish, silly creature,' said Nicholas cheerfully. 'If that is what you mean, I grant you that. Why, here's a dismal face for ladies' company! - my pretty sister too, whom you have so often asked me about. Is this your Yorkshire gallantry? For shame! for shame!'

Smike brightened up and smiled.

'When I talk of home,' pursued Nicholas, 'I talk of mine - which is yours of course. If it were defined by any particular four walls and a roof, God knows I should be sufficiently puzzled to say whereabouts it lay; but that is not what I mean. When I speak of home, I speak of the place where - in default of a better - those I love are gathered together; and if that place were a gypsy's tent, or a barn, I should call it by the same good name notwithstanding. And now, for what is my present home, which, however alarming your expectations may be, will neither terrify you by its extent nor its magnificence!'

So saying, Nicholas took his companion by the arm, and saying a great deal more to the same purpose, and pointing out various things to amuse and interest him as they went along, led the way to Miss La Creevy's house.

'And this, Kate,' said Nicholas, entering the room where his sister sat alone, 'is the faithful friend and affectionate fellow-traveller whom I prepared you to receive.'

Poor Smike was bashful, and awkward, and frightened enough, at first, but Kate advanced towards him so kindly, and said, in such a sweet voice, how anxious she had been to see him after all her brother had told her, and how much she had to thank him for having comforted Nicholas so greatly in their very trying reverses, that he began to be very doubtful whether he should shed tears or not, and

became still more flurried. However, he managed to say, in a broken voice, that Nicholas was his only friend, and that he would lay down his life to help him; and Kate, although she was so kind and considerate, seemed to be so wholly unconscious of his distress and embarrassment, that he recovered almost immediately and felt quite at home.

Then, Miss La Creevy came in; and to her Smike had to be presented also. And Miss La Creevy was very kind too, and wonderfully talkative: not to Smike, for that would have made him uneasy at first, but to Nicholas and his sister. Then, after a time, she would speak to Smike himself now and then, asking him whether he was a judge of likenesses, and whether he thought that picture in the corner was like herself, and whether he didn't think it would have looked better if she had made herself ten years younger, and whether he didn't think, as a matter of general observation, that young ladies looked better not only in pictures, but out of them too, than old ones; with many more small jokes and facetious remarks, which were delivered with such good-humour and merriment, that Smike thought, within himself, she was the nicest lady he had ever seen; even nicer than Mrs Grudden, of Mr Vincent Crummles's theatre; and she was a nice lady too, and talked, perhaps more, but certainly louder, than Miss La Creevy.

At length the door opened again, and a lady in mourning came in; and Nicholas kissing the lady in mourning affectionately, and calling her his mother, led her towards the chair from which Smike had risen when she entered the room.

'You are always kind-hearted, and anxious to help the oppressed, my dear mother,' said Nicholas, 'so you will be favourably disposed towards him, I know.'

'I am sure, my dear Nicholas,' replied Mrs Nickleby, looking very hard at her new friend, and bending to him with something more of majesty than the occasion seemed to require: 'I am sure any friend of yours has, as indeed he naturally ought to have, and must have, of course, you know, a great claim upon me, and of course, it is a very great pleasure to me to be introduced to anybody you take an interest in. There can he no doubt about that; none at all; not the least in the world,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'At the same time I must say, Nicholas, my dear, as I used to say to your poor dear papa, when he WOULD bring gentlemen home to dinner, and there was nothing in the house, that if he had come the day before yesterday - no, I don't mean the day before yesterday now; I should have said, perhaps, the year before last - we should have been better able to entertain him.'

With which remarks, Mrs Nickleby turned to her daughter, and inquired, in an audible whisper, whether the gentleman was going to stop all night.

'Because, if he is, Kate, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'I don't see that it's possible for him to sleep anywhere, and that's the truth.'

Kate stepped gracefully forward, and without any show of annoyance or irritation, breathed a few words into her mother's ear.

'La, Kate, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby, shrinking back, 'how you do tickle one! Of course, I understand THAT, my love, without your telling me; and I said the same to Nicholas, and I AM very much pleased. You didn't tell me, Nicholas, my dear,' added Mrs Nickleby, turning round with an air of less reserve than she had before assumed, 'what your friend's name is.'

'His name, mother,' replied Nicholas, 'is Smike.'

The effect of this communication was by no means anticipated; but the name was no sooner pronounced, than Mrs Nickleby dropped upon a chair, and burst into a fit of crying.

'What is the matter?' exclaimed Nicholas, running to support her.

'It's so like Pyke,' cried Mrs Nickleby; 'so exactly like Pyke. Oh! don't speak to me - I shall be better presently.'

And after exhibiting every symptom of slow suffocation in all its stages, and drinking about a tea-spoonful of water from a full tumbler, and spilling the remainder, Mrs Nickleby WAS better, and remarked, with a feeble smile, that she was very foolish, she knew.

'It's a weakness in our family,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'so, of course, I can't be blamed for it. Your grandmama, Kate, was exactly the same - precisely. The least excitement, the slightest surprise - she fainted away directly. I have heard her say, often and often, that when she was a young lady, and before she was married, she was turning a corner into Oxford Street one day, when she ran against her own hairdresser, who, it seems, was escaping from a bear; - the mere suddenness of the encounter made her faint away directly. Wait, though,' added Mrs Nickleby, pausing to consider. 'Let me be sure I'm right. Was it her hairdresser who had escaped from a bear, or was it a bear who had escaped from her hairdresser's? I declare I can't remember just now, but the hairdresser was a very handsome man, I know, and quite a gentleman in his manners; so that it has nothing to do with the point of the story.'

Mrs Nickleby having fallen imperceptibly into one of her retrospective moods, improved in temper from that moment, and glided, by an easy change of the conversation occasionally, into various other anecdotes, no less remarkable for their strict application to the subject in hand.

'Mr Smike is from Yorkshire, Nicholas, my dear?' said Mrs Nickleby, after dinner, and when she had been silent for some time.

'Certainly, mother,' replied Nicholas. 'I see you have not forgotten his melancholy history.'

'O dear no,' cried Mrs Nickleby. 'Ah! melancholy, indeed. You don't happen, Mr Smike, ever to have dined with the Grimbles of Grimble Hall, somewhere in the North Riding, do you?' said the good lady, addressing herself to him. 'A very proud man, Sir Thomas Grimble, with six grown-up and most lovely daughters, and the finest park in the county.'

'My dear mother,' reasoned Nicholas, 'do you suppose that the unfortunate outcast of a Yorkshire school was likely to receive many cards of invitation from the nobility and gentry in the neighbourhood?'

'Really, my dear, I don't know why it should be so very extraordinary,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'I know that when I was at school, I always went at least twice every half-year to the Hawkinses at Taunton Vale, and they are much richer than the Grimbles, and connected with them in marriage; so you see it's not so very unlikely, after all.'

Having put down Nicholas in this triumphant manner, Mrs Nickleby was suddenly seized with a forgetfulness of Smike's real name, and an irresistible tendency to call him Mr Slammons; which circumstance she attributed to the remarkable similarity of the two names in point of sound both beginning with an S, and moreover being spelt with an M. But whatever doubt there might be on this point, there was none as to his being a most excellent listener; which circumstance had considerable influence in placing them on the very best terms, and inducing Mrs Nickleby to express the highest opinion of his general deportment and disposition.

Thus, the little circle remained, on the most amicable and agreeable footing, until the Monday morning, when Nicholas withdrew himself from it for a short time, seriously to reflect upon the state of his affairs, and to determine, if he could, upon some course of life, which would enable him to support those who were so entirely dependent upon his exertions.

Mr Crummles occurred to him more than once; but although Kate was acquainted with the whole history of his connection with that

gentleman, his mother was not; and he foresaw a thousand fretful objections, on her part, to his seeking a livelihood upon the stage. There were graver reasons, too, against his returning to that mode of life. Independently of those arising out of its spare and precarious earnings, and his own internal conviction that he could never hope to aspire to any great distinction, even as a provincial actor, how could he carry his sister from town to town, and place to place, and debar her from any other associates than those with whom he would be compelled, almost without distinction, to mingle? 'It won't do,' said Nicholas, shaking his head; 'I must try something else.'

It was much easier to make this resolution than to carry it into effect. With no greater experience of the world than he had acquired for himself in his short trials; with a sufficient share of headlong rashness and precipitation (qualities not altogether unnatural at his time of life); with a very slender stock of money, and a still more scanty stock of friends; what could he do? 'Egad!' said Nicholas, 'I'll try that Register Office again.'

He smiled at himself as he walked away with a quick step; for, an instant before, he had been internally blaming his own precipitation. He did not laugh himself out of the intention, however, for on he went: picturing to himself, as he approached the place, all kinds of splendid possibilities, and impossibilities too, for that matter, and thinking himself, perhaps with good reason, very fortunate to be endowed with so buoyant and sanguine a temperament.

The office looked just the same as when he had left it last, and, indeed, with one or two exceptions, there seemed to be the very same placards in the window that he had seen before. There were the same unimpeachable masters and mistresses in want of virtuous servants, and the same virtuous servants in want of unimpeachable masters and mistresses, and the same magnificent estates for the investment of capital, and the same enormous quantities of capital to be invested in estates, and, in short, the same opportunities of all sorts for people who wanted to make their fortunes. And a most extraordinary proof it was of the national prosperity, that people had not been found to avail themselves of such advantages long ago.

As Nicholas stopped to look in at the window, an old gentleman happened to stop too; and Nicholas, carrying his eye along the window-panes from left to right in search of some capital-text placard which should be applicable to his own case, caught sight of this old gentleman's figure, and instinctively withdrew his eyes from the window, to observe the same more closely.

He was a sturdy old fellow in a broad-skirted blue coat, made pretty large, to fit easily, and with no particular waist; his bulky legs clothed

in drab breeches and high gaiters, and his head protected by a low-crowned broad-brimmed white hat, such as a wealthy grazier might wear. He wore his coat buttoned; and his dimpled double chin rested in the folds of a white neckerchief - not one of your stiff-starched apoplectic cravats, but a good, easy, old-fashioned white neckcloth that a man might go to bed in and be none the worse for. But what principally attracted the attention of Nicholas was the old gentleman's eye, - never was such a clear, twinkling, honest, merry, happy eye, as that. And there he stood, looking a little upward, with one hand thrust into the breast of his coat, and the other playing with his old-fashioned gold watch-chain: his head thrown a little on one side, and his hat a little more on one side than his head, (but that was evidently accident; not his ordinary way of wearing it,) with such a pleasant smile playing about his mouth, and such a comical expression of mingled slyness, simplicity, kind-heartedness, and good-humour, lighting up his jolly old face, that Nicholas would have been content to have stood there and looked at him until evening, and to have forgotten, meanwhile, that there was such a thing as a soured mind or a crabbed countenance to be met with in the whole wide world.

But, even a very remote approach to this gratification was not to be made, for although he seemed quite unconscious of having been the subject of observation, he looked casually at Nicholas; and the latter, fearful of giving offence, resumed his scrutiny of the window instantly.

Still, the old gentleman stood there, glancing from placard to placard, and Nicholas could not forbear raising his eyes to his face again. Grafted upon the quaintness and oddity of his appearance, was something so indescribably engaging, and bespeaking so much worth, and there were so many little lights hovering about the corners of his mouth and eyes, that it was not a mere amusement, but a positive pleasure and delight to look at him.

This being the case, it is no wonder that the old man caught Nicholas in the fact, more than once. At such times, Nicholas coloured and looked embarrassed: for the truth is, that he had begun to wonder whether the stranger could, by any possibility, be looking for a clerk or secretary; and thinking this, he felt as if the old gentleman must know it.

Long as all this takes to tell, it was not more than a couple of minutes in passing. As the stranger was moving away, Nicholas caught his eye again, and, in the awkwardness of the moment, stammered out an apology.

'No offence. Oh no offence!' said the old man.

This was said in such a hearty tone, and the voice was so exactly what it should have been from such a speaker, and there was such a cordiality in the manner, that Nicholas was emboldened to speak again.

'A great many opportunities here, sir,' he said, half smiling as he motioned towards the window.

'A great many people willing and anxious to be employed have seriously thought so very often, I dare say,' replied the old man. 'Poor fellows, poor fellows!'

He moved away as he said this; but seeing that Nicholas was about to speak, good-naturedly slackened his pace, as if he were unwilling to cut him short. After a little of that hesitation which may be sometimes observed between two people in the street who have exchanged a nod, and are both uncertain whether they shall turn back and speak, or not, Nicholas found himself at the old man's side.

'You were about to speak, young gentleman; what were you going to say?'

'Merely that I almost hoped - I mean to say, thought - you had some object in consulting those advertisements,' said Nicholas.

'Ay, ay? what object now - what object?' returned the old man, looking slyly at Nicholas. 'Did you think I wanted a situation now - eh? Did you think I did?'

Nicholas shook his head.

'Ha! ha!' laughed the old gentleman, rubbing his hands and wrists as if he were washing them. 'A very natural thought, at all events, after seeing me gazing at those bills. I thought the same of you, at first; upon my word I did.'

'If you had thought so at last, too, sir, you would not have been far from the truth,' rejoined Nicholas.

'Eh?' cried the old man, surveying him from head to foot. 'What! Dear me! No, no. Well-behaved young gentleman reduced to such a necessity! No no, no no.'

Nicholas bowed, and bidding him good-morning, turned upon his heel.

'Stay,' said the old man, beckoning him into a bye street, where they could converse with less interruption. 'What d'ye mean, eh?'

'Merely that your kind face and manner - both so unlike any I have ever seen - tempted me into an avowal, which, to any other stranger in this wilderness of London, I should not have dreamt of making,' returned Nicholas.

'Wilderness! Yes, it is, it is. Good! It IS a wilderness,' said the old man with much animation. 'It was a wilderness to me once. I came here barefoot. I have never forgotten it. Thank God!' and he raised his hat from his head, and looked very grave.

'What's the matter? What is it? How did it all come about?' said the old man, laying his hand on the shoulder of Nicholas, and walking him up the street. 'You're - Eh?' laying his finger on the sleeve of his black coat. 'Who's it for, eh?'

'My father,' replied Nicholas.

'Ah!' said the old gentleman quickly. 'Bad thing for a young man to lose his father. Widowed mother, perhaps?'

Nicholas sighed.

'Brothers and sisters too? Eh?'

'One sister,' rejoined Nicholas.

'Poor thing, poor thing! You are a scholar too, I dare say?' said the old man, looking wistfully into the face of the young one.

'I have been tolerably well educated,' said Nicholas.

'Fine thing,' said the old gentleman, 'education a great thing: a very great thing! I never had any. I admire it the more in others. A very fine thing. Yes, yes. Tell me more of your history. Let me hear it all. No impertinent curiosity - no, no, no.'

There was something so earnest and guileless in the way in which all this was said, and such a complete disregard of all conventional restraints and coldnesses, that Nicholas could not resist it. Among men who have any sound and sterling qualities, there is nothing so contagious as pure openness of heart. Nicholas took the infection instantly, and ran over the main points of his little history without reserve: merely suppressing names, and touching as lightly as possible upon his uncle's treatment of Kate. The old man listened with great attention, and when he had concluded, drew his arm eagerly through his own.

'Don't say another word. Not another word' said he. 'Come along with me. We mustn't lose a minute.'

So saying, the old gentleman dragged him back into Oxford Street, and hailing an omnibus on its way to the city, pushed Nicholas in before him, and followed himself.

As he appeared in a most extraordinary condition of restless excitement, and whenever Nicholas offered to speak, immediately interposed with: 'Don't say another word, my dear sir, on any account - not another word,' the young man thought it better to attempt no further interruption. Into the city they journeyed accordingly, without interchanging any conversation; and the farther they went, the more Nicholas wondered what the end of the adventure could possibly be.

The old gentleman got out, with great alacrity, when they reached the Bank, and once more taking Nicholas by the arm, hurried him along Threadneedle Street, and through some lanes and passages on the right, until they, at length, emerged in a quiet shady little square. Into the oldest and cleanest-looking house of business in the square, he led the way. The only inscription on the door-post was 'Cheeryble, Brothers;' but from a hasty glance at the directions of some packages which were lying about, Nicholas supposed that the brothers Cheeryble were German merchants.

Passing through a warehouse which presented every indication of a thriving business, Mr Cheeryble (for such Nicholas supposed him to be, from the respect which had been shown him by the warehousemen and porters whom they passed) led him into a little partitioned-off counting-house like a large glass case, in which counting-house there sat - as free from dust and blemish as if he had been fixed into the glass case before the top was put on, and had never come out since - a fat, elderly, large-faced clerk, with silver spectacles and a powdered head.

'Is my brother in his room, Tim?' said Mr Cheeryble, with no less kindness of manner than he had shown to Nicholas.

'Yes, he is, sir,' replied the fat clerk, turning his spectacle-glasses towards his principal, and his eyes towards Nicholas, 'but Mr Trimmers is with him.'

'Ay! And what has he come about, Tim?' said Mr Cheeryble.

'He is getting up a subscription for the widow and family of a man who was killed in the East India Docks this morning, sir,' rejoined Tim. 'Smashed, sir, by a cask of sugar.'

'He is a good creature,' said Mr Cheeryble, with great earnestness. 'He is a kind soul. I am very much obliged to Trimmers. Trimmers is one of the best friends we have. He makes a thousand cases known to us that we should never discover of ourselves. I am VERY much obliged to Trimmers.' Saying which, Mr Cheeryble rubbed his hands with infinite delight, and Mr Trimmers happening to pass the door that instant, on his way out, shot out after him and caught him by the hand.

'I owe you a thousand thanks, Trimmers, ten thousand thanks. I take it very friendly of you, very friendly indeed,' said Mr Cheeryble, dragging him into a corner to get out of hearing. 'How many children are there, and what has my brother Ned given, Trimmers?'

'There are six children,' replied the gentleman, 'and your brother has given us twenty pounds.'

'My brother Ned is a good fellow, and you're a good fellow too, Trimmers,' said the old man, shaking him by both hands with trembling eagerness. 'Put me down for another twenty - or - stop a minute, stop a minute. We mustn't look ostentatious; put me down ten pound, and Tim Linkinwater ten pound. A cheque for twenty pound for Mr Trimmers, Tim. God bless you, Trimmers - and come and dine with us some day this week; you'll always find a knife and fork, and we shall be delighted. Now, my dear sir - cheque from Mr Linkinwater, Tim. Smashed by a cask of sugar, and six poor children - oh dear, dear, dear!'

Talking on in this strain, as fast as he could, to prevent any friendly remonstrances from the collector of the subscription on the large amount of his donation, Mr Cheeryble led Nicholas, equally astonished and affected by what he had seen and heard in this short space, to the half-opened door of another room.

'Brother Ned,' said Mr Cheeryble, tapping with his knuckles, and stooping to listen, 'are you busy, my dear brother, or can you spare time for a word or two with me?'

'Brother Charles, my dear fellow,' replied a voice from the inside, so like in its tones to that which had just spoken, that Nicholas started, and almost thought it was the same, 'don't ask me such a question, but come in directly.'

They went in, without further parley. What was the amazement of Nicholas when his conductor advanced, and exchanged a warm greeting with another old gentleman, the very type and model of himself - the same face, the same figure, the same coat, waistcoat,

and neckcloth, the same breeches and gaiters - nay, there was the very same white hat hanging against the wall!

As they shook each other by the hand: the face of each lighted up by beaming looks of affection, which would have been most delightful to behold in infants, and which, in men so old, was inexpressibly touching: Nicholas could observe that the last old gentleman was something stouter than his brother; this, and a slight additional shade of clumsiness in his gait and stature, formed the only perceptible difference between them. Nobody could have doubted their being twin brothers.

'Brother Ned,' said Nicholas's friend, closing the room-door, 'here is a young friend of mine whom we must assist. We must make proper inquiries into his statements, in justice to him as well as to ourselves, and if they are confirmed - as I feel assured they will be - we must assist him, we must assist him, brother Ned.'

'It is enough, my dear brother, that you say we should,' returned the other. 'When you say that, no further inquiries are needed. He SHALL be assisted. What are his necessities, and what does he require? Where is Tim Linkinwater? Let us have him here.'

Both the brothers, it may be here remarked, had a very emphatic and earnest delivery; both had lost nearly the same teeth, which imparted the same peculiarity to their speech; and both spoke as if, besides possessing the utmost serenity of mind that the kindliest and most unsuspecting nature could bestow, they had, in collecting the plums from Fortune's choicest pudding, retained a few for present use, and kept them in their mouths.

'Where is Tim Linkinwater?' said brother Ned.

'Stop, stop, stop!' said brother Charles, taking the other aside. 'I've a plan, my dear brother, I've a plan. Tim is getting old, and Tim has been a faithful servant, brother Ned; and I don't think pensioning Tim's mother and sister, and buying a little tomb for the family when his poor brother died, was a sufficient recompense for his faithful services.'

'No, no, no,' replied the other. 'Certainly not. Not half enough, not half.'

'If we could lighten Tim's duties,' said the old gentleman, 'and prevail upon him to go into the country, now and then, and sleep in the fresh air, besides, two or three times a week (which he could, if he began business an hour later in the morning), old Tim Linkinwater would grow young again in time; and he's three good years our senior now.

Old Tim Linkinwater young again! Eh, brother Ned, eh? Why, I recollect old Tim Linkinwater quite a little boy, don't you? Ha, ha, ha! Poor Tim, poor Tim!'

And the fine old fellows laughed pleasantly together: each with a tear of regard for old Tim Linkinwater standing in his eye.

'But hear this first - hear this first, brother Ned,' said the old man, hastily, placing two chairs, one on each side of Nicholas: 'I'll tell it you myself, brother Ned, because the young gentleman is modest, and is a scholar, Ned, and I shouldn't feel it right that he should tell us his story over and over again as if he was a beggar, or as if we doubted him. No, no no.'

'No, no, no,' returned the other, nodding his head gravely. 'Very right, my dear brother, very right.'

'He will tell me I'm wrong, if I make a mistake,' said Nicholas's friend. 'But whether I do or not, you'll be very much affected, brother Ned, remembering the time when we were two friendless lads, and earned our first shilling in this great city.'

The twins pressed each other's hands in silence; and in his own homely manner, brother Charles related the particulars he had heard from Nicholas. The conversation which ensued was a long one, and when it was over, a secret conference of almost equal duration took place between brother Ned and Tim Linkinwater in another room. It is no disparagement to Nicholas to say, that before he had been closeted with the two brothers ten minutes, he could only wave his hand at every fresh expression of kindness and sympathy, and sob like a little child.

At length brother Ned and Tim Linkinwater came back together, when Tim instantly walked up to Nicholas and whispered in his ear in a very brief sentence (for Tim was ordinarily a man of few words), that he had taken down the address in the Strand, and would call upon him that evening, at eight. Having done which, Tim wiped his spectacles and put them on, preparatory to hearing what more the brothers Cheeryble had got to say.

'Tim,' said brother Charles, 'you understand that we have an intention of taking this young gentleman into the counting-house?'

Brother Ned remarked that Tim was aware of that intention, and quite approved of it; and Tim having nodded, and said he did, drew himself up and looked particularly fat, and very important. After which, there was a profound silence.

'I'm not coming an hour later in the morning, you know,' said Tim, breaking out all at once, and looking very resolute. 'I'm not going to sleep in the fresh air; no, nor I'm not going into the country either. A pretty thing at this time of day, certainly. Pho!'

'Damn your obstinacy, Tim Linkinwater,' said brother Charles, looking at him without the faintest spark of anger, and with a countenance radiant with attachment to the old clerk. 'Damn your obstinacy, Tim Linkinwater, what do you mean, sir?'

'It's forty-four year,' said Tim, making a calculation in the air with his pen, and drawing an imaginary line before he cast it up, 'forty-four year, next May, since I first kept the books of Cheeryble, Brothers. I've opened the safe every morning all that time (Sundays excepted) as the clock struck nine, and gone over the house every night at half-past ten (except on Foreign Post nights, and then twenty minutes before twelve) to see the doors fastened, and the fires out. I've never slept out of the back-attic one single night. There's the same mignonette box in the middle of the window, and the same four flower-pots, two on each side, that I brought with me when I first came. There an't - I've said it again and again, and I'll maintain it - there an't such a square as this in the world. I KNOW there an't,' said Tim, with sudden energy, and looking sternly about him. 'Not one. For business or pleasure, in summer-time or winter - I don't care which - there's nothing like it. There's not such a spring in England as the pump under the archway. There's not such a view in England as the view out of my window; I've seen it every morning before I shaved, and I ought to know something about it. I have slept in that room,' added Tim, sinking his voice a little, 'for four-and-forty year; and if it wasn't inconvenient, and didn't interfere with business, I should request leave to die there.'

'Damn you, Tim Linkinwater, how dare you talk about dying?' roared the twins by one impulse, and blowing their old noses violently.

'That's what I've got to say, Mr Edwin and Mr Charles,' said Tim, squaring his shoulders again. 'This isn't the first time you've talked about superannuating me; but, if you please, we'll make it the last, and drop the subject for evermore.'

With these words, Tim Linkinwater stalked out, and shut himself up in his glass case, with the air of a man who had had his say, and was thoroughly resolved not to be put down.

The brothers interchanged looks, and coughed some half-dozen times without speaking.

'He must be done something with, brother Ned,' said the other, warmly; 'we must disregard his old scruples; they can't be tolerated,

or borne. He must be made a partner, brother Ned; and if he won't submit to it peaceably, we must have recourse to violence.'

'Quite right,' replied brother Ned, nodding his head as a man thoroughly determined; 'quite right, my dear brother. If he won't listen to reason, we must do it against his will, and show him that we are determined to exert our authority. We must quarrel with him, brother Charles.'

'We must. We certainly must have a quarrel with Tim Linkinwater,' said the other. 'But in the meantime, my dear brother, we are keeping our young friend; and the poor lady and her daughter will be anxious for his return. So let us say goodbye for the present, and - there, there - take care of that box, my dear sir - and - no, no, not a word now; but be careful of the crossings and - '

And with any disjointed and unconnected words which would prevent Nicholas from pouring forth his thanks, the brothers hurried him out: shaking hands with him all the way, and affecting very unsuccessfully - they were poor hands at deception! - to be wholly unconscious of the feelings that completely mastered him.

Nicholas's heart was too full to allow of his turning into the street until he had recovered some composure. When he at last glided out of the dark doorway corner in which he had been compelled to halt, he caught a glimpse of the twins stealthily peeping in at one corner of the glass case, evidently undecided whether they should follow up their late attack without delay, or for the present postpone laying further siege to the inflexible Tim Linkinwater.

To recount all the delight and wonder which the circumstances just detailed awakened at Miss La Creevy's, and all the things that were done, said, thought, expected, hoped, and prophesied in consequence, is beside the present course and purpose of these adventures. It is sufficient to state, in brief, that Mr Timothy Linkinwater arrived, punctual to his appointment; that, oddity as he was, and jealous, as he was bound to be, of the proper exercise of his employers' most comprehensive liberality, he reported strongly and warmly in favour of Nicholas; and that, next day, he was appointed to the vacant stool in the counting-house of Cheeryble, Brothers, with a present salary of one hundred and twenty pounds a year.

'And I think, my dear brother,' said Nicholas's first friend, 'that if we were to let them that little cottage at Bow which is empty, at something under the usual rent, now? Eh, brother Ned?'

'For nothing at all,' said brother Ned. 'We are rich, and should be ashamed to touch the rent under such circumstances as these. Where

is Tim Linkinwater? - for nothing at all, my dear brother, for nothing at all.'

'Perhaps it would be better to say something, brother Ned,' suggested the other, mildly; 'it would help to preserve habits of frugality, you know, and remove any painful sense of overwhelming obligations. We might say fifteen pound, or twenty pound, and if it was punctually paid, make it up to them in some other way. And I might secretly advance a small loan towards a little furniture, and you might secretly advance another small loan, brother Ned; and if we find them doing well - as we shall; there's no fear, no fear - we can change the loans into gifts. Carefully, brother Ned, and by degrees, and without pressing upon them too much; what do you say now, brother?'

Brother Ned gave his hand upon it, and not only said it should be done, but had it done too; and, in one short week, Nicholas took possession of the stool, and Mrs Nickleby and Kate took possession of the house, and all was hope, bustle, and light-heartedness.

There surely never was such a week of discoveries and surprises as the first week of that cottage. Every night when Nicholas came home, something new had been found out. One day it was a grapevine, and another day it was a boiler, and another day it was the key of the front-parlour closet at the bottom of the water-butt, and so on through a hundred items. Then, this room was embellished with a muslin curtain, and that room was rendered quite elegant by a window-blind, and such improvements were made, as no one would have supposed possible. Then there was Miss La Creevy, who had come out in the omnibus to stop a day or two and help, and who was perpetually losing a very small brown-paper parcel of tin tacks and a very large hammer, and running about with her sleeves tucked up at the wrists, and falling off pairs of steps and hurting herself very much - and Mrs Nickleby, who talked incessantly, and did something now and then, but not often - and Kate, who busied herself noiselessly everywhere, and was pleased with everything - and Smike, who made the garden a perfect wonder to look upon - and Nicholas, who helped and encouraged them every one - all the peace and cheerfulness of home restored, with such new zest imparted to every frugal pleasure, and such delight to every hour of meeting, as misfortune and separation alone could give!

In short, the poor Nicklebys were social and happy; while the rich Nickleby was alone and miserable.