

## Chapter XLII

### **Illustrative of the convivial Sentiment, that the best of Friends must sometimes part**

The pavement of Snow Hill had been baking and frying all day in the heat, and the twain Saracens' heads guarding the entrance to the hostelry of whose name and sign they are the duplicate presentments, looked - or seemed, in the eyes of jaded and footsore passers-by, to look - more vicious than usual, after blistering and scorching in the sun, when, in one of the inn's smallest sitting-rooms, through whose open window there rose, in a palpable steam, wholesome exhalations from reeking coach-horses, the usual furniture of a tea-table was displayed in neat and inviting order, flanked by large joints of roast and boiled, a tongue, a pigeon pie, a cold fowl, a tankard of ale, and other little matters of the like kind, which, in degenerate towns and cities, are generally understood to belong more particularly to solid lunches, stage-coach dinners, or unusually substantial breakfasts.

Mr John Browdie, with his hands in his pockets, hovered restlessly about these delicacies, stopping occasionally to whisk the flies out of the sugar-basin with his wife's pocket-handkerchief, or to dip a teaspoon in the milk-pot and carry it to his mouth, or to cut off a little knob of crust, and a little corner of meat, and swallow them at two gulps like a couple of pills. After every one of these flirtations with the eatables, he pulled out his watch, and declared with an earnestness quite pathetic that he couldn't undertake to hold out two minutes longer.

'Tilly!' said John to his lady, who was reclining half awake and half asleep upon a sofa.

'Well, John!'

'Well, John!' retorted her husband, impatiently. 'Dost thou feel hoongry, lass?'

'Not very,' said Mrs Browdie.

'Not vary!' repeated John, raising his eyes to the ceiling. 'Hear her say not vary, and us dining at three, and loonching off pasthry thot aggravates a mon 'stead of pacifying him! Not vary!'

'Here's a gen'l'man for you, sir,' said the waiter, looking in.

'A wa'at for me?' cried John, as though he thought it must be a letter, or a parcel.

'A gen'l'man, sir.'

'Stars and garters, chap!' said John, 'wa'at dost thou coom and say thot for? In wi' 'un.'

'Are you at home, sir?'

'At whoam!' cried John, 'I wish I wur; I'd ha tea'd two hour ago. Why, I told t'ooother chap to look sharp ootside door, and tell 'un d'rectly he coom, thot we war faint wi' hoonger. In wi' 'un. Aha! Thee hond, Misther Nickleby. This is nigh to be the proodest day o' my life, sir. Hoo be all wi' ye? Ding! But, I'm glod o' this!'

Quite forgetting even his hunger in the heartiness of his salutation, John Browdie shook Nicholas by the hand again and again, slapping his palm with great violence between each shake, to add warmth to the reception.

'Ah! there she be,' said John, observing the look which Nicholas directed towards his wife. 'There she be - we shan't quarrel about her noo - eh? Ecod, when I think o' thot - but thou want'st soom'at to eat. Fall to, mun, fall to, and for wa'at we're about to receive - '

No doubt the grace was properly finished, but nothing more was heard, for John had already begun to play such a knife and fork, that his speech was, for the time, gone.

'I shall take the usual licence, Mr Browdie,' said Nicholas, as he placed a chair for the bride.

'Tak' whatever thou like'st,' said John, 'and when a's gane, ca' for more.'

Without stopping to explain, Nicholas kissed the blushing Mrs Browdie, and handed her to her seat.

'I say,' said John, rather astounded for the moment, 'mak' theeself quite at whoam, will 'ee?'

'You may depend upon that,' replied Nicholas; 'on one condition.'

'And wa'at may thot be?' asked John.

'That you make me a godfather the very first time you have occasion for one.'

'Eh! d'ye hear thot?' cried John, laying down his knife and fork. 'A godfeyther! Ha! ha! ha! Tilly - hear till 'un - a godfeyther! Divn't say a

word more, ye'll never beat thot. Occasion for 'un - a godfeyther! Ha! ha! ha!

Never was man so tickled with a respectable old joke, as John Browdie was with this. He chuckled, roared, half suffocated himself by laughing large pieces of beef into his windpipe, roared again, persisted in eating at the same time, got red in the face and black in the forehead, coughed, cried, got better, went off again laughing inwardly, got worse, choked, had his back thumped, stamped about, frightened his wife, and at last recovered in a state of the last exhaustion and with the water streaming from his eyes, but still faintly ejaculating, 'A godfeyther - a godfeyther, Tilly!' in a tone bespeaking an exquisite relish of the sally, which no suffering could diminish.

'You remember the night of our first tea-drinking?' said Nicholas.

'Shall I e'er forget it, mun?' replied John Browdie.

'He was a desperate fellow that night though, was he not, Mrs Browdie?' said Nicholas. 'Quite a monster!'

'If you had only heard him as we were going home, Mr Nickleby, you'd have said so indeed,' returned the bride. 'I never was so frightened in all my life.'

'Coom, coom,' said John, with a broad grin; 'thou know'st betther than thot, Tilly.'

'So I was,' replied Mrs Browdie. 'I almost made up my mind never to speak to you again.'

'A'most!' said John, with a broader grin than the last. 'A'most made up her mind! And she wur coaxin', and coaxin', and wheedlin', and wheedlin' a' the blessed wa'. 'Wa'at didst thou let yon chap mak' oop tiv'ee for?' says I. 'I deedn't, John,' says she, a squeedgin my arm. 'You deedn't?' says I. 'Noa,' says she, a squeedgin of me agean.'

'Lor, John!' interposed his pretty wife, colouring very much. 'How can you talk such nonsense? As if I should have dreamt of such a thing!'

'I dinnot know whether thou'd ever dreamt of it, though I think that's loike eneaf, mind,' retorted John; 'but thou didst it. 'Ye're a feeckle, changeable weathercock, lass,' says I. 'Not feeckle, John,' says she. 'Yes,' says I, 'feeckle, dom'd feeckle. Dinnot tell me thou bean't, efther yon chap at schoolmeasther's,' says I. 'Him!' says she, quite screeching. 'Ah! him!' says I. 'Why, John,' says she - and she coom a deal closer and squeedged a deal harder than she'd deane afore - 'dost thou think it's nat'ral noo, that having such a proper mun as thou to

keep company wi', I'd ever tak' opp wi' such a leetle scanty whipper-snapper as yon?' she says. Ha! ha! ha! She said whipper-snapper! 'Ecod!' I says, 'efther thot, neame the day, and let's have it ower!' Ha! ha! ha!

Nicholas laughed very heartily at this story, both on account of its telling against himself, and his being desirous to spare the blushes of Mrs Browdie, whose protestations were drowned in peals of laughter from her husband. His good-nature soon put her at her ease; and although she still denied the charge, she laughed so heartily at it, that Nicholas had the satisfaction of feeling assured that in all essential respects it was strictly true.

'This is the second time,' said Nicholas, 'that we have ever taken a meal together, and only third I have ever seen you; and yet it really seems to me as if I were among old friends.'

'Weel!' observed the Yorkshireman, 'so I say.'

'And I am sure I do,' added his young wife.

'I have the best reason to be impressed with the feeling, mind,' said Nicholas; 'for if it had not been for your kindness of heart, my good friend, when I had no right or reason to expect it, I know not what might have become of me or what plight I should have been in by this time.'

'Talk about soom'at else,' replied John, gruffly, 'and dinnot bother.'

'It must be a new song to the same tune then,' said Nicholas, smiling. 'I told you in my letter that I deeply felt and admired your sympathy with that poor lad, whom you released at the risk of involving yourself in trouble and difficulty; but I can never tell you how grateful he and I, and others whom you don't know, are to you for taking pity on him.'

'Ecod!' rejoined John Browdie, drawing up his chair; 'and I can never tell YOU hoo grateful soom folks that we do know would be loikewise, if THEY know'd I had takken pity on him.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Mrs Browdie, 'what a state I was in that night!'

'Were they at all disposed to give you credit for assisting in the escape?' inquired Nicholas of John Browdie.

'Not a bit,' replied the Yorkshireman, extending his mouth from ear to ear. 'There I lay, snoog in schoolmeaster's bed long efther it was dark, and nobody coom nigh the pleace. 'Weel!' thinks I, 'he's got a pretty good start, and if he bean't whoam by noo, he never will be; so

you may coom as quick as you loike, and foind us reddy' - that is, you know, schoolmeasther might coom.'

'I understand,' said Nicholas.

'Presently,' resumed John, 'he DID coom. I heerd door shut doonstairs, and him a warking, oop in the daark. 'Slow and stedly,' I says to myself, 'tak' your time, sir - no hurry.' He cooms to the door, turns the key - turns the key when there warn't nothing to hoold the lock - and ca's oot 'Hallo, there!' - 'Yes,' thinks I, 'you may do thot agean, and not wakken anybody, sir.' 'Hallo, there,' he says, and then he stops. 'Thou'd bettther not aggravate me,' says schoolmeasther, efther a little time. 'I'll brak' every boan in your boddy, Smike,' he says, efther another little time. Then all of a soodden, he sings oot for a loight, and when it cooms - ecod, such a hoorly-boorly! 'Wa'at's the matter?' says I. 'He's gane,' says he, - stark mad wi' vengeance. 'Have you heerd nought?' 'Ees,' says I, 'I heerd street-door shut, no time at a' ago. I heerd a person run doon there' (pointing t'other wa' - eh?) 'Help!' he cries. 'I'll help you,' says I; and off we set - the wrong wa'! Ho! ho! ho!'

'Did you go far?' asked Nicholas.

'Far!' replied John; 'I run him clean off his legs in quarther of an hoor. To see old schoolmeasther wi'out his hat, skimming along oop to his knees in mud and wather, tumbling over fences, and rowling into ditches, and bawling oot like mad, wi' his one eye looking sharp out for the lad, and his coat-tails flying out behind, and him spattered wi' mud all ower, face and all! I tho't I should ha' dropped doon, and killed myself wi' laughing.'

John laughed so heartily at the mere recollection, that he communicated the contagion to both his hearers, and all three burst into peals of laughter, which were renewed again and again, until they could laugh no longer.

'He's a bad 'un,' said John, wiping his eyes; 'a very bad 'un, is schoolmeasther.'

'I can't bear the sight of him, John,' said his wife.

'Coom,' retorted John, 'thot's tidy in you, thot is. If it wa'nt along o' you, we shouldn't know nought about 'un. Thou know'd 'un first, Tilly, didn't thou?'

'I couldn't help knowing Fanny Squeers, John,' returned his wife; 'she was an old playmate of mine, you know.'

'Weel,' replied John, 'dean't I say so, lass? It's best to be neighbourly, and keep up old acquaintance loike; and what I say is, dean't quarrel if 'ee can help it. Dinnot think so, Mr Nickleby?'

'Certainly,' returned Nicholas; 'and you acted upon that principle when I meet you on horseback on the road, after our memorable evening.'

'Sure-ly,' said John. 'Wa'at I say, I stick by.'

'And that's a fine thing to do, and manly too,' said Nicholas, 'though it's not exactly what we understand by 'coming Yorkshire over us' in London. Miss Squeers is stopping with you, you said in your note.'

'Yes,' replied John, 'Tilly's bridesmaid; and a queer bridesmaid she be, too. She wean't be a bride in a hurry, I reckon.'

'For shame, John,' said Mrs Browdie; with an acute perception of the joke though, being a bride herself. 'The groom will be a blessed mun,' said John, his eyes twinkling at the idea. 'He'll be in luck, he will.'

'You see, Mr Nickleby,' said his wife, 'that it was in consequence of her being here, that John wrote to you and fixed tonight, because we thought that it wouldn't be pleasant for you to meet, after what has passed.'

'Unquestionably. You were quite right in that,' said Nicholas, interrupting.

'Especially,' observed Mrs Browdie, looking very sly, 'after what we know about past and gone love matters.'

'We know, indeed!' said Nicholas, shaking his head. 'You behaved rather wickedly there, I suspect.'

'O' course she did,' said John Browdie, passing his huge forefinger through one of his wife's pretty ringlets, and looking very proud of her. 'She wur always as skittish and full o' tricks as a - '

'Well, as a what?' said his wife.

'As a woman,' returned John. 'Ding! But I dinnot know ought else that cooms near it.'

'You were speaking about Miss Squeers,' said Nicholas, with the view of stopping some slight connubialities which had begun to pass between Mr and Mrs Browdie, and which rendered the position of a

third party in some degree embarrassing, as occasioning him to feel rather in the way than otherwise.

'Oh yes,' rejoined Mrs Browdie. 'John ha' done. John fixed tonight, because she had settled that she would go and drink tea with her father. And to make quite sure of there being nothing amiss, and of your being quite alone with us, he settled to go out there and fetch her home.'

'That was a very good arrangement,' said Nicholas, 'though I am sorry to be the occasion of so much trouble.'

'Not the least in the world,' returned Mrs Browdie; 'for we have looked forward to see you - John and I have - with the greatest possible pleasure. Do you know, Mr Nickleby,' said Mrs Browdie, with her archest smile, 'that I really think Fanny Squeers was very fond of you?'

'I am very much obliged to her,' said Nicholas; 'but upon my word, I never aspired to making any impression upon her virgin heart.'

'How you talk!' tittered Mrs Browdie. 'No, but do you know that really - seriously now and without any joking - I was given to understand by Fanny herself, that you had made an offer to her, and that you two were going to be engaged quite solemn and regular.'

'Was you, ma'am - was you?' cried a shrill female voice, 'was you given to understand that I - I - was going to be engaged to an assassinating thief that shed the gore of my pa? Do you - do you think, ma'am - that I was very fond of such dirt beneath my feet, as I couldn't condescend to touch with kitchen tongs, without blacking and crocking myself by the contract? Do you, ma'am - do you? Oh! base and degrading 'Tilda!'

With these reproaches Miss Squeers flung the door wide open, and disclosed to the eyes of the astonished Browdies and Nicholas, not only her own symmetrical form, arrayed in the chaste white garments before described (a little dirtier), but the form of her brother and father, the pair of Wackfords.

'This is the hend, is it?' continued Miss Squeers, who, being excited, aspirated her h's strongly; 'this is the hend, is it, of all my forbearance and friendship for that double-faced thing - that viper, that - that - mermaid?' (Miss Squeers hesitated a long time for this last epithet, and brought it out triumphantly as last, as if it quite clinched the business.) 'This is the hend, is it, of all my bearing with her deceitfulness, her lowness, her falseness, her laying herself out to catch the admiration of vulgar minds, in a way which made me blush for my - for my - '

'Gender,' suggested Mr Squeers, regarding the spectators with a malevolent eye - literally A malevolent eye.

'Yes,' said Miss Squeers; 'but I thank my stars that my ma is of the same - '

'Hear, hear!' remarked Mr Squeers; 'and I wish she was here to have a scratch at this company.'

'This is the hend, is it,' said Miss Squeers, tossing her head, and looking contemptuously at the floor, 'of my taking notice of that rubbishing creature, and demeaning myself to patronise her?'

'Oh, come,' rejoined Mrs Browdie, disregarding all the endeavours of her spouse to restrain her, and forcing herself into a front row, 'don't talk such nonsense as that.'

'Have I not patronised you, ma'am?' demanded Miss Squeers.

'No,' returned Mrs Browdie.

'I will not look for blushes in such a quarter,' said Miss Squeers, haughtily, 'for that countenance is a stranger to everything but hignominiousness and red-faced boldness.'

'I say,' interposed John Browdie, nettled by these accumulated attacks on his wife, 'dra' it mild, dra' it mild.'

'You, Mr Browdie,' said Miss Squeers, taking him up very quickly, 'I pity. I have no feeling for you, sir, but one of unliquidated pity.' 'Oh!' said John.

'No,' said Miss Squeers, looking sideways at her parent, 'although I AM a queer bridesmaid, and SHAN'T be a bride in a hurry, and although my husband WILL be in luck, I entertain no sentiments towards you, sir, but sentiments of pity.'

Here Miss Squeers looked sideways at her father again, who looked sideways at her, as much as to say, 'There you had him.'

'I know what you've got to go through,' said Miss Squeers, shaking her curls violently. 'I know what life is before you, and if you was my bitterest and deadliest enemy, I could wish you nothing worse.'

'Couldn't you wish to be married to him yourself, if that was the case?' inquired Mrs Browdie, with great suavity of manner.

'Oh, ma'am, how witty you are,' retorted Miss Squeers with a low curtsy, 'almost as witty, ma'am, as you are clever. How very clever it was in you, ma'am, to choose a time when I had gone to tea with my pa, and was sure not to come back without being fetched! What a pity you never thought that other people might be as clever as yourself and spoil your plans!'

'You won't vex me, child, with such airs as these,' said the late Miss Price, assuming the matron.

'Don't MISSIS me, ma'am, if you please,' returned Miss Squeers, sharply. 'I'll not bear it. Is THIS the hend - '

'Dang it a',' cried John Browdie, impatiently. 'Say thee say out, Fanny, and mak' sure it's the end, and dinnot ask nobody whether it is or not.'

'Thanking you for your advice which was not required, Mr Browdie,' returned Miss Squeers, with laborious politeness, 'have the goodness not to presume to meddle with my Christian name. Even my pity shall never make me forget what's due to myself, Mr Browdie. 'Tilda,' said Miss Squeers, with such a sudden accession of violence that John started in his boots, 'I throw you off for ever, miss. I abandon you. I renounce you. I wouldn't,' cried Miss Squeers in a solemn voice, 'have a child named 'Tilda, not to save it from its grave.'

'As for the matther o' that,' observed John, 'it'll be time eneaf to think about neaming of it when it cooms.'

'John!' interposed his wife, 'don't tease her.'

'Oh! Tease, indeed!' cried Miss Squeers, bristling up. 'Tease, indeed! He, he! Tease, too! No, don't tease her. Consider her feelings, pray!'

'If it's fated that listeners are never to hear any good of themselves,' said Mrs Browdie, 'I can't help it, and I am very sorry for it. But I will say, Fanny, that times out of number I have spoken so kindly of you behind your back, that even you could have found no fault with what I said.'

'Oh, I dare say not, ma'am!' cried Miss Squeers, with another curtsy. 'Best thanks to you for your goodness, and begging and praying you not to be hard upon me another time!'

'I don't know,' resumed Mrs Browdie, 'that I have said anything very bad of you, even now. At all events, what I did say was quite true; but if I have, I am very sorry for it, and I beg your pardon. You have said

much worse of me, scores of times, Fanny; but I have never borne any malice to you, and I hope you'll not bear any to me.'

Miss Squeers made no more direct reply than surveying her former friend from top to toe, and elevating her nose in the air with ineffable disdain. But some indistinct allusions to a 'puss,' and a 'minx,' and a 'contemptible creature,' escaped her; and this, together with a severe biting of the lips, great difficulty in swallowing, and very frequent comings and goings of breath, seemed to imply that feelings were swelling in Miss Squeers's bosom too great for utterance.

While the foregoing conversation was proceeding, Master Wackford, finding himself unnoticed, and feeling his preponderating inclinations strong upon him, had by little and little sidled up to the table and attacked the food with such slight skirmishing as drawing his fingers round and round the inside of the plates, and afterwards sucking them with infinite relish; picking the bread, and dragging the pieces over the surface of the butter; pocketing lumps of sugar, pretending all the time to be absorbed in thought; and so forth. Finding that no interference was attempted with these small liberties, he gradually mounted to greater, and, after helping himself to a moderately good cold collation, was, by this time, deep in the pie.

Nothing of this had been unobserved by Mr Squeers, who, so long as the attention of the company was fixed upon other objects, hugged himself to think that his son and heir should be fattening at the enemy's expense. But there being now an appearance of a temporary calm, in which the proceedings of little Wackford could scarcely fail to be observed, he feigned to be aware of the circumstance for the first time, and inflicted upon the face of that young gentleman a slap that made the very tea-cups ring.

'Eating!' cried Mr Squeers, 'of what his father's enemies has left! It's fit to go and poison you, you unnat'ral boy.'

'It wean't hurt him,' said John, apparently very much relieved by the prospect of having a man in the quarrel; 'let' un eat. I wish the whole school was here. I'd give'em soom'at to stay their unfort'nate stomachs wi', if I spent the last penny I had!'

Squeers scowled at him with the worst and most malicious expression of which his face was capable - it was a face of remarkable capability, too, in that way - and shook his fist stealthily.

'Coom, coom, schoolmeaster,' said John, 'dinnot make a fool o' thyself; for if I was to sheake mine - only once - thou'd fa' doon wi' the wind o' it.'

'It was you, was it,' returned Squeers, 'that helped off my runaway boy? It was you, was it?'

'Me!' returned John, in a loud tone. 'Yes, it wa' me, coom; wa'at o' that? It wa' me. Noo then!'

'You hear him say he did it, my child!' said Squeers, appealing to his daughter. 'You hear him say he did it!'

'Did it!' cried John. 'I'll tell 'ee more; hear this, too. If thou'd got another roonaway boy, I'd do it agean. If thou'd got twonty roonaway boys, I'd do it twonty times ower, and twonty more to thot; and I tell thee more,' said John, 'noo my blood is oop, that thou'rt an old ra'ascal; and that it's weel for thou, thou be'est an old 'un, or I'd ha' pooned thee to flour when thou told an honest mun hoo thou'd licked that poor chap in t' coorch.'

'An honest man!' cried Squeers, with a sneer.

'Ah! an honest man,' replied John; 'honest in ought but ever putting legs under seame table wi' such as thou.'

'Scandal!' said Squeers, exultingly. 'Two witnesses to it; Wackford knows the nature of an oath, he does; we shall have you there, sir. Rascal, eh?' Mr Squeers took out his pocketbook and made a note of it. 'Very good. I should say that was worth full twenty pound at the next assizes, without the honesty, sir.'

'Soizes,' cried John, 'thou'd betther not talk to me o' 'Soizes. Yorkshire schools have been shown up at 'Soizes afore noo, mun, and it's a ticklish soobject to revive, I can tell ye.'

Mr Squeers shook his head in a threatening manner, looking very white with passion; and taking his daughter's arm, and dragging little Wackford by the hand, retreated towards the door.

'As for you,' said Squeers, turning round and addressing Nicholas, who, as he had caused him to smart pretty soundly on a former occasion, purposely abstained from taking any part in the discussion, 'see if I ain't down upon you before long. You'll go a kidnapping of boys, will you? Take care their fathers don't turn up - mark that - take care their fathers don't turn up, and send 'em back to me to do as I like with, in spite of you.'

'I am not afraid of that,' replied Nicholas, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously, and turning away.

'Ain't you!' retorted Squeers, with a diabolical look. 'Now then, come along.'

'I leave such society, with my pa, for Hever,' said Miss Squeers, looking contemptuously and loftily round. 'I am defiled by breathing the air with such creatures. Poor Mr Browdie! He! he! he! I do pity him, that I do; he's so deluded. He! he! he! - Artful and designing 'Tilda!'

With this sudden relapse into the sternest and most majestic wrath, Miss Squeers swept from the room; and having sustained her dignity until the last possible moment, was heard to sob and scream and struggle in the passage.

John Browdie remained standing behind the table, looking from his wife to Nicholas, and back again, with his mouth wide open, until his hand accidentally fell upon the tankard of ale, when he took it up, and having obscured his features therewith for some time, drew a long breath, handed it over to Nicholas, and rang the bell.

'Here, wather,' said John, briskly. 'Look alive here. Tak' these things awa', and let's have soomat broiled for sooper - vary comfortable and plenty o' it - at ten o'clock. Bring soom brandy and soom wather, and a pair o' slippers - the largest pair in the house - and be quick about it. Dash ma wig!' said John, rubbing his hands, 'there's no ganging oot to neeght, noo, to fetch anybody whoam, and ecod, we'll begin to spend the evening in airnest.'