

Chapter XLIII

Officiates as a kind of Gentleman Usher, in bringing various People together

The storm had long given place to a calm the most profound, and the evening was pretty far advanced - indeed supper was over, and the process of digestion proceeding as favourably as, under the influence of complete tranquillity, cheerful conversation, and a moderate allowance of brandy-and-water, most wise men conversant with the anatomy and functions of the human frame will consider that it ought to have proceeded, when the three friends, or as one might say, both in a civil and religious sense, and with proper deference and regard to the holy state of matrimony, the two friends, (Mr and Mrs Browdie counting as no more than one,) were startled by the noise of loud and angry threatenings below stairs, which presently attained so high a pitch, and were conveyed besides in language so towering, sanguinary, and ferocious, that it could hardly have been surpassed, if there had actually been a Saracen's head then present in the establishment, supported on the shoulders and surmounting the trunk of a real, live, furious, and most unappeasable Saracen.

This turmoil, instead of quickly subsiding after the first outburst, (as turmoils not unfrequently do, whether in taverns, legislative assemblies, or elsewhere,) into a mere grumbling and growling squabble, increased every moment; and although the whole din appeared to be raised by but one pair of lungs, yet that one pair was of so powerful a quality, and repeated such words as 'scoundrel,' 'rascal,' 'insolent puppy,' and a variety of expletives no less flattering to the party addressed, with such great relish and strength of tone, that a dozen voices raised in concert under any ordinary circumstances would have made far less uproar and created much smaller consternation.

'Why, what's the matter?' said Nicholas, moving hastily towards the door.

John Browdie was striding in the same direction when Mrs Browdie turned pale, and, leaning back in her chair, requested him with a faint voice to take notice, that if he ran into any danger it was her intention to fall into hysterics immediately, and that the consequences might be more serious than he thought for. John looked rather disconcerted by this intelligence, though there was a lurking grin on his face at the same time; but, being quite unable to keep out of the fray, he compromised the matter by tucking his wife's arm under his own, and, thus accompanied, following Nicholas downstairs with all speed.

The passage outside the coffee-room door was the scene of disturbance, and here were congregated the coffee-room customers and waiters, together with two or three coachmen and helpers from the yard. These had hastily assembled round a young man who from his appearance might have been a year or two older than Nicholas, and who, besides having given utterance to the defiances just now described, seemed to have proceeded to even greater lengths in his indignation, inasmuch as his feet had no other covering than a pair of stockings, while a couple of slippers lay at no great distance from the head of a prostrate figure in an opposite corner, who bore the appearance of having been shot into his present retreat by means of a kick, and complimented by having the slippers flung about his ears afterwards.

The coffee-room customers, and the waiters, and the coachmen, and the helpers - not to mention a barmaid who was looking on from behind an open sash window - seemed at that moment, if a spectator might judge from their winks, nods, and muttered exclamations, strongly disposed to take part against the young gentleman in the stockings. Observing this, and that the young gentleman was nearly of his own age and had in nothing the appearance of an habitual brawler, Nicholas, impelled by such feelings as will influence young men sometimes, felt a very strong disposition to side with the weaker party, and so thrust himself at once into the centre of the group, and in a more emphatic tone, perhaps, than circumstances might seem to warrant, demanded what all that noise was about.

'Hallo!' said one of the men from the yard, 'this is somebody in disguise, this is.'

'Room for the eldest son of the Emperor of Roosher, gen'l'men!' cried another fellow.

Disregarding these sallies, which were uncommonly well received, as sallies at the expense of the best-dressed persons in a crowd usually are, Nicholas glanced carelessly round, and addressing the young gentleman, who had by this time picked up his slippers and thrust his feet into them, repeated his inquiries with a courteous air.

'A mere nothing!' he replied.

At this a murmur was raised by the lookers-on, and some of the boldest cried, 'Oh, indeed! - Wasn't it though? - Nothing, eh? - He called that nothing, did he? Lucky for him if he found it nothing.' These and many other expressions of ironical disapprobation having been exhausted, two or three of the out-of-door fellows began to hustle Nicholas and the young gentleman who had made the noise: stumbling against them by accident, and treading on their toes, and

so forth. But this being a round game, and one not necessarily limited to three or four players, was open to John Browdie too, who, bursting into the little crowd - to the great terror of his wife - and falling about in all directions, now to the right, now to the left, now forwards, now backwards, and accidentally driving his elbow through the hat of the tallest helper, who had been particularly active, speedily caused the odds to wear a very different appearance; while more than one stout fellow limped away to a respectful distance, anathematising with tears in his eyes the heavy tread and ponderous feet of the burly Yorkshireman.

'Let me see him do it again,' said he who had been kicked into the corner, rising as he spoke, apparently more from the fear of John Browdie's inadvertently treading upon him, than from any desire to place himself on equal terms with his late adversary. 'Let me see him do it again. That's all.'

'Let me hear you make those remarks again,' said the young man, 'and I'll knock that head of yours in among the wine-glasses behind you there.'

Here a waiter who had been rubbing his hands in excessive enjoyment of the scene, so long as only the breaking of heads was in question, adjured the spectators with great earnestness to fetch the police, declaring that otherwise murder would be surely done, and that he was responsible for all the glass and china on the premises.

'No one need trouble himself to stir,' said the young gentleman, 'I am going to remain in the house all night, and shall be found here in the morning if there is any assault to answer for.'

'What did you strike him for?' asked one of the bystanders.

'Ah! what did you strike him for?' demanded the others.

The unpopular gentleman looked coolly round, and addressing himself to Nicholas, said:

'You inquired just now what was the matter here. The matter is simply this. Yonder person, who was drinking with a friend in the coffee-room when I took my seat there for half an hour before going to bed, (for I have just come off a journey, and preferred stopping here tonight, to going home at this hour, where I was not expected until tomorrow,) chose to express himself in very disrespectful, and insolently familiar terms, of a young lady, whom I recognised from his description and other circumstances, and whom I have the honour to know. As he spoke loud enough to be overheard by the other guests who were present, I informed him most civilly that he was mistaken in his

conjectures, which were of an offensive nature, and requested him to forbear. He did so for a little time, but as he chose to renew his conversation when leaving the room, in a more offensive strain than before, I could not refrain from making after him, and facilitating his departure by a kick, which reduced him to the posture in which you saw him just now. I am the best judge of my own affairs, I take it,' said the young man, who had certainly not quite recovered from his recent heat; 'if anybody here thinks proper to make this quarrel his own, I have not the smallest earthly objection, I do assure him.'

Of all possible courses of proceeding under the circumstances detailed, there was certainly not one which, in his then state of mind, could have appeared more laudable to Nicholas than this. There were not many subjects of dispute which at that moment could have come home to his own breast more powerfully, for having the unknown uppermost in his thoughts, it naturally occurred to him that he would have done just the same if any audacious gossipier durst have presumed in his hearing to speak lightly of her. Influenced by these considerations, he espoused the young gentleman's quarrel with great warmth, protesting that he had done quite right, and that he respected him for it; which John Browdie (albeit not quite clear as to the merits) immediately protested too, with not inferior vehemence.

'Let him take care, that's all,' said the defeated party, who was being rubbed down by a waiter, after his recent fall on the dusty boards. 'He don't knock me about for nothing, I can tell him that. A pretty state of things, if a man isn't to admire a handsome girl without being beat to pieces for it!'

This reflection appeared to have great weight with the young lady in the bar, who (adjusting her cap as she spoke, and glancing at a mirror) declared that it would be a very pretty state of things indeed; and that if people were to be punished for actions so innocent and natural as that, there would be more people to be knocked down than there would be people to knock them down, and that she wondered what the gentleman meant by it, that she did.

'My dear girl,' said the young gentleman in a low voice, advancing towards the sash window.

'Nonsense, sir!' replied the young lady sharply, smiling though as she turned aside, and biting her lip, (whereat Mrs Browdie, who was still standing on the stairs, glanced at her with disdain, and called to her husband to come away).

'No, but listen to me,' said the young man. 'If admiration of a pretty face were criminal, I should be the most hopeless person alive, for I cannot resist one. It has the most extraordinary effect upon me,

checks and controls me in the most furious and obstinate mood. You see what an effect yours has had upon me already.'

'Oh, that's very pretty,' replied the young lady, tossing her head, 'but -'

'Yes, I know it's very pretty,' said the young man, looking with an air of admiration in the barmaid's face; 'I said so, you know, just this moment. But beauty should be spoken of respectfully - respectfully, and in proper terms, and with a becoming sense of its worth and excellence, whereas this fellow has no more notion -'

The young lady interrupted the conversation at this point, by thrusting her head out of the bar-window, and inquiring of the waiter in a shrill voice whether that young man who had been knocked down was going to stand in the passage all night, or whether the entrance was to be left clear for other people. The waiters taking the hint, and communicating it to the hostlers, were not slow to change their tone too, and the result was, that the unfortunate victim was bundled out in a twinkling.

'I am sure I have seen that fellow before,' said Nicholas.

'Indeed!' replied his new acquaintance.

'I am certain of it,' said Nicholas, pausing to reflect. 'Where can I have - stop! - yes, to be sure - he belongs to a register-office up at the west end of the town. I knew I recollected the face.'

It was, indeed, Tom, the ugly clerk.

'That's odd enough!' said Nicholas, ruminating upon the strange manner in which the register-office seemed to start up and stare him in the face every now and then, and when he least expected it.

'I am much obliged to you for your kind advocacy of my cause when it most needed an advocate,' said the young man, laughing, and drawing a card from his pocket. 'Perhaps you'll do me the favour to let me know where I can thank you.'

Nicholas took the card, and glancing at it involuntarily as he returned the compliment, evinced very great surprise.

'Mr Frank Cheeryble!' said Nicholas. 'Surely not the nephew of Cheeryble Brothers, who is expected tomorrow!'

'I don't usually call myself the nephew of the firm,' returned Mr Frank, good-humouredly; 'but of the two excellent individuals who compose

it, I am proud to say I AM the nephew. And you, I see, are Mr Nickleby, of whom I have heard so much! This is a most unexpected meeting, but not the less welcome, I assure you.'

Nicholas responded to these compliments with others of the same kind, and they shook hands warmly. Then he introduced John Browdie, who had remained in a state of great admiration ever since the young lady in the bar had been so skilfully won over to the right side. Then Mrs John Browdie was introduced, and finally they all went upstairs together and spent the next half-hour with great satisfaction and mutual entertainment; Mrs John Browdie beginning the conversation by declaring that of all the made-up things she ever saw, that young woman below-stairs was the vainest and the plainest.

This Mr Frank Cheeryble, although, to judge from what had recently taken place, a hot-headed young man (which is not an absolute miracle and phenomenon in nature), was a sprightly, good-humoured, pleasant fellow, with much both in his countenance and disposition that reminded Nicholas very strongly of the kind-hearted brothers. His manner was as unaffected as theirs, and his demeanour full of that heartiness which, to most people who have anything generous in their composition, is peculiarly prepossessing. Add to this, that he was good-looking and intelligent, had a plentiful share of vivacity, was extremely cheerful, and accommodated himself in five minutes' time to all John Browdie's oddities with as much ease as if he had known him from a boy; and it will be a source of no great wonder that, when they parted for the night, he had produced a most favourable impression, not only upon the worthy Yorkshireman and his wife, but upon Nicholas also, who, revolving all these things in his mind as he made the best of his way home, arrived at the conclusion that he had laid the foundation of a most agreeable and desirable acquaintance.

'But it's a most extraordinary thing about that register-office fellow!' thought Nicholas. 'Is it likely that this nephew can know anything about that beautiful girl? When Tim Linkinwater gave me to understand the other day that he was coming to take a share in the business here, he said he had been superintending it in Germany for four years, and that during the last six months he had been engaged in establishing an agency in the north of England. That's four years and a half - four years and a half. She can't be more than seventeen - say eighteen at the outside. She was quite a child when he went away, then. I should say he knew nothing about her and had never seen her, so HE can give me no information. At all events,' thought Nicholas, coming to the real point in his mind, 'there can be no danger of any prior occupation of her affections in that quarter; that's quite clear.'

Is selfishness a necessary ingredient in the composition of that passion called love, or does it deserve all the fine things which poets,

in the exercise of their undoubted vocation, have said of it? There are, no doubt, authenticated instances of gentlemen having given up ladies and ladies having given up gentlemen to meritorious rivals, under circumstances of great high-mindedness; but is it quite established that the majority of such ladies and gentlemen have not made a virtue of necessity, and nobly resigned what was beyond their reach; as a private soldier might register a vow never to accept the order of the Garter, or a poor curate of great piety and learning, but of no family - save a very large family of children - might renounce a bishopric?

Here was Nicholas Nickleby, who would have scorned the thought of counting how the chances stood of his rising in favour or fortune with the brothers Cheeryble, now that their nephew had returned, already deep in calculations whether that same nephew was likely to rival him in the affections of the fair unknown - discussing the matter with himself too, as gravely as if, with that one exception, it were all settled; and recurring to the subject again and again, and feeling quite indignant and ill-used at the notion of anybody else making love to one with whom he had never exchanged a word in all his life. To be sure, he exaggerated rather than depreciated the merits of his new acquaintance; but still he took it as a kind of personal offence that he should have any merits at all - in the eyes of this particular young lady, that is; for elsewhere he was quite welcome to have as many as he pleased. There was undoubted selfishness in all this, and yet Nicholas was of a most free and generous nature, with as few mean or sordid thoughts, perhaps, as ever fell to the lot of any man; and there is no reason to suppose that, being in love, he felt and thought differently from other people in the like sublime condition.

He did not stop to set on foot an inquiry into his train of thought or state of feeling, however; but went thinking on all the way home, and continued to dream on in the same strain all night. For, having satisfied himself that Frank Cheeryble could have no knowledge of, or acquaintance with, the mysterious young lady, it began to occur to him that even he himself might never see her again; upon which hypothesis he built up a very ingenious succession of tormenting ideas which answered his purpose even better than the vision of Mr Frank Cheeryble, and tantalised and worried him, waking and sleeping.

Notwithstanding all that has been said and sung to the contrary, there is no well-established case of morning having either deferred or hastened its approach by the term of an hour or so for the mere gratification of a splenetic feeling against some unoffending lover: the sun having, in the discharge of his public duty, as the books of precedent report, invariably risen according to the almanacs, and without suffering himself to be swayed by any private considerations. So, morning came as usual, and with it business-hours, and with

them Mr Frank Cheeryble, and with him a long train of smiles and welcomes from the worthy brothers, and a more grave and clerk-like, but scarcely less hearty reception from Mr Timothy Linkinwater.

'That Mr Frank and Mr Nickleby should have met last night,' said Tim Linkinwater, getting slowly off his stool, and looking round the counting-house with his back planted against the desk, as was his custom when he had anything very particular to say: 'that those two young men should have met last night in that manner is, I say, a coincidence, a remarkable coincidence. Why, I don't believe now,' added Tim, taking off his spectacles, and smiling as with gentle pride, 'that there's such a place in all the world for coincidences as London is!'

'I don't know about that,' said Mr Frank; 'but - '

'Don't know about it, Mr Francis!' interrupted Tim, with an obstinate air. 'Well, but let us know. If there is any better place for such things, where is it? Is it in Europe? No, that it isn't. Is it in Asia? Why, of course it's not. Is it in Africa? Not a bit of it. Is it in America? YOU know better than that, at all events. Well, then,' said Tim, folding his arms resolutely, 'where is it?'

'I was not about to dispute the point, Tim,' said young Cheeryble, laughing. 'I am not such a heretic as that. All I was going to say was, that I hold myself under an obligation to the coincidence, that's all.'

'Oh! if you don't dispute it,' said Tim, quite satisfied, 'that's another thing. I'll tell you what though. I wish you had. I wish you or anybody would. I would so put that man down,' said Tim, tapping the forefinger of his left hand emphatically with his spectacles, 'so put that man down by argument - '

It was quite impossible to find language to express the degree of mental prostration to which such an adventurous wight would be reduced in the keen encounter with Tim Linkinwater, so Tim gave up the rest of his declaration in pure lack of words, and mounted his stool again.

'We may consider ourselves, brother Ned,' said Charles, after he had patted Tim Linkinwater approvingly on the back, 'very fortunate in having two such young men about us as our nephew Frank and Mr Nickleby. It should be a source of great satisfaction and pleasure to us.'

'Certainly, Charles, certainly,' returned the other.

'Of Tim,' added brother Ned, 'I say nothing whatever, because Tim is a mere child - an infant - a nobody that we never think of or take into account at all. Tim, you villain, what do you say to that, sir?'

'I am jealous of both of 'em,' said Tim, 'and mean to look out for another situation; so provide yourselves, gentlemen, if you please.'

Tim thought this such an exquisite, unparalleled, and most extraordinary joke, that he laid his pen upon the inkstand, and rather tumbling off his stool than getting down with his usual deliberation, laughed till he was quite faint, shaking his head all the time so that little particles of powder flew palpably about the office. Nor were the brothers at all behind-hand, for they laughed almost as heartily at the ludicrous idea of any voluntary separation between themselves and old Tim. Nicholas and Mr Frank laughed quite boisterously, perhaps to conceal some other emotion awakened by this little incident, (and so, indeed, did the three old fellows after the first burst,) so perhaps there was as much keen enjoyment and relish in that laugh, altogether, as the politest assembly ever derived from the most poignant witticism uttered at any one person's expense.

'Mr Nickleby,' said brother Charles, calling him aside, and taking him kindly by the hand, 'I - I - am anxious, my dear sir, to see that you are properly and comfortably settled in the cottage. We cannot allow those who serve us well to labour under any privation or discomfort that it is in our power to remove. I wish, too, to see your mother and sister: to know them, Mr Nickleby, and have an opportunity of relieving their minds by assuring them that any trifling service we have been able to do them is a great deal more than repaid by the zeal and ardour you display. - Not a word, my dear sir, I beg. Tomorrow is Sunday. I shall make bold to come out at teatime, and take the chance of finding you at home; if you are not, you know, or the ladies should feel a delicacy in being intruded on, and would rather not be known to me just now, why I can come again another time, any other time would do for me. Let it remain upon that understanding. Brother Ned, my dear fellow, let me have a word with you this way.'

The twins went out of the office arm-in-arm, and Nicholas, who saw in this act of kindness, and many others of which he had been the subject that morning, only so many delicate renewals on the arrival of their nephew of the kind assurance which the brothers had given him in his absence, could scarcely feel sufficient admiration and gratitude for such extraordinary consideration.

The intelligence that they were to have visitor - and such a visitor - next day, awakened in the breast of Mrs Nickleby mingled feelings of exultation and regret; for whereas on the one hand she hailed it as an omen of her speedy restoration to good society and the almost-

forgotten pleasures of morning calls and evening tea-drinkings, she could not, on the other, but reflect with bitterness of spirit on the absence of a silver teapot with an ivory knob on the lid, and a milk-jug to match, which had been the pride of her heart in days of yore, and had been kept from year's end to year's end wrapped up in wash-leather on a certain top shelf which now presented itself in lively colours to her sorrowing imagination.

'I wonder who's got that spice-box,' said Mrs Nickleby, shaking her head. 'It used to stand in the left-hand corner, next but two to the pickled onions. You remember that spice-box, Kate?'

'Perfectly well, mama.'

'I shouldn't think you did, Kate,' returned Mrs Nickleby, in a severe manner, 'talking about it in that cold and unfeeling way! If there is any one thing that vexes me in these losses more than the losses themselves, I do protest and declare,' said Mrs Nickleby, rubbing her nose with an impassioned air, 'that it is to have people about me who take things with such provoking calmness.'

'My dear mama,' said Kate, stealing her arm round her mother's neck, 'why do you say what I know you cannot seriously mean or think, or why be angry with me for being happy and content? You and Nicholas are left to me, we are together once again, and what regard can I have for a few trifling things of which we never feel the want? When I have seen all the misery and desolation that death can bring, and known the lonesome feeling of being solitary and alone in crowds, and all the agony of separation in grief and poverty when we most needed comfort and support from each other, can you wonder that I look upon this as a place of such delicious quiet and rest, that with you beside me I have nothing to wish for or regret? There was a time, and not long since, when all the comforts of our old home did come back upon me, I own, very often - oftener than you would think perhaps - but I affected to care nothing for them, in the hope that you would so be brought to regret them the less. I was not insensible, indeed. I might have felt happier if I had been. Dear mama,' said Kate, in great agitation, 'I know no difference between this home and that in which we were all so happy for so many years, except that the kindest and gentlest heart that ever ached on earth has passed in peace to heaven.'

'Kate my dear, Kate,' cried Mrs Nickleby, folding her in her arms.

'I have so often thought,' sobbed Kate, 'of all his kind words - of the last time he looked into my little room, as he passed upstairs to bed, and said 'God bless you, darling.' There was a paleness in his face, mama - the broken heart - I know it was - I little thought so - then - '

A gush of tears came to her relief, and Kate laid her head upon her mother's breast, and wept like a little child.

It is an exquisite and beautiful thing in our nature, that when the heart is touched and softened by some tranquil happiness or affectionate feeling, the memory of the dead comes over it most powerfully and irresistibly. It would almost seem as though our better thoughts and sympathies were charms, in virtue of which the soul is enabled to hold some vague and mysterious intercourse with the spirits of those whom we dearly loved in life. Alas! how often and how long may those patient angels hover above us, watching for the spell which is so seldom uttered, and so soon forgotten!

Poor Mrs Nickleby, accustomed to give ready utterance to whatever came uppermost in her mind, had never conceived the possibility of her daughter's dwelling upon these thoughts in secret, the more especially as no hard trial or querulous reproach had ever drawn them from her. But now, when the happiness of all that Nicholas had just told them, and of their new and peaceful life, brought these recollections so strongly upon Kate that she could not suppress them, Mrs Nickleby began to have a glimmering that she had been rather thoughtless now and then, and was conscious of something like self-reproach as she embraced her daughter, and yielded to the emotions which such a conversation naturally awakened.

There was a mighty bustle that night, and a vast quantity of preparation for the expected visitor, and a very large nosegay was brought from a gardener's hard by, and cut up into a number of very small ones, with which Mrs Nickleby would have garnished the little sitting-room, in a style that certainly could not have failed to attract anybody's attention, if Kate had not offered to spare her the trouble, and arranged them in the prettiest and neatest manner possible. If the cottage ever looked pretty, it must have been on such a bright and sunshiny day as the next day was. But Smike's pride in the garden, or Mrs Nickleby's in the condition of the furniture, or Kate's in everything, was nothing to the pride with which Nicholas looked at Kate herself; and surely the costliest mansion in all England might have found in her beautiful face and graceful form its most exquisite and peerless ornament.

About six o'clock in the afternoon Mrs Nickleby was thrown into a great flutter of spirits by the long-expected knock at the door, nor was this flutter at all composed by the audible tread of two pair of boots in the passage, which Mrs Nickleby augured, in a breathless state, must be 'the two Mr Cheerybles;' as it certainly was, though not the two Mrs Nickleby expected, because it was Mr Charles Cheeryble, and his nephew, Mr Frank, who made a thousand apologies for his intrusion, which Mrs Nickleby (having tea-spoons enough and to spare for all)

most graciously received. Nor did the appearance of this unexpected visitor occasion the least embarrassment, (save in Kate, and that only to the extent of a blush or two at first,) for the old gentleman was so kind and cordial, and the young gentleman imitated him in this respect so well, that the usual stiffness and formality of a first meeting showed no signs of appearing, and Kate really more than once detected herself in the very act of wondering when it was going to begin.

At the tea-table there was plenty of conversation on a great variety of subjects, nor were there wanting jocose matters of discussion, such as they were; for young Mr Cheeryble's recent stay in Germany happening to be alluded to, old Mr Cheeryble informed the company that the aforesaid young Mr Cheeryble was suspected to have fallen deeply in love with the daughter of a certain German burgomaster. This accusation young Mr Cheeryble most indignantly repelled, upon which Mrs Nickleby slyly remarked, that she suspected, from the very warmth of the denial, there must be something in it. Young Mr Cheeryble then earnestly entreated old Mr Cheeryble to confess that it was all a jest, which old Mr Cheeryble at last did, young Mr Cheeryble being so much in earnest about it, that - as Mrs Nickleby said many thousand times afterwards in recalling the scene - he 'quite coloured,' which she rightly considered a memorable circumstance, and one worthy of remark, young men not being as a class remarkable for modesty or self-denial, especially when there is a lady in the case, when, if they colour at all, it is rather their practice to colour the story, and not themselves.

After tea there was a walk in the garden, and the evening being very fine they strolled out at the garden-gate into some lanes and bye-roads, and sauntered up and down until it grew quite dark. The time seemed to pass very quickly with all the party. Kate went first, leaning upon her brother's arm, and talking with him and Mr Frank Cheeryble; and Mrs Nickleby and the elder gentleman followed at a short distance, the kindness of the good merchant, his interest in the welfare of Nicholas, and his admiration of Kate, so operating upon the good lady's feelings, that the usual current of her speech was confined within very narrow and circumscribed limits. Smike (who, if he had ever been an object of interest in his life, had been one that day) accompanied them, joining sometimes one group and sometimes the other, as brother Charles, laying his hand upon his shoulder, bade him walk with him, or Nicholas, looking smilingly round, beckoned him to come and talk with the old friend who understood him best, and who could win a smile into his careworn face when none else could.

Pride is one of the seven deadly sins; but it cannot be the pride of a mother in her children, for that is a compound of two cardinal virtues

- faith and hope. This was the pride which swelled Mrs Nickleby's heart that night, and this it was which left upon her face, glistening in the light when they returned home, traces of the most grateful tears she had ever shed.

There was a quiet mirth about the little supper, which harmonised exactly with this tone of feeling, and at length the two gentlemen took their leave. There was one circumstance in the leave-taking which occasioned a vast deal of smiling and pleasantry, and that was, that Mr Frank Cheeryble offered his hand to Kate twice over, quite forgetting that he had bade her adieu already. This was held by the elder Mr Cheeryble to be a convincing proof that he was thinking of his German flame, and the jest occasioned immense laughter. So easy is it to move light hearts.

In short, it was a day of serene and tranquil happiness; and as we all have some bright day - many of us, let us hope, among a crowd of others - to which we revert with particular delight, so this one was often looked back to afterwards, as holding a conspicuous place in the calendar of those who shared it.

Was there one exception, and that one he who needed to have been most happy?

Who was that who, in the silence of his own chamber, sunk upon his knees to pray as his first friend had taught him, and folding his hands and stretching them wildly in the air, fell upon his face in a passion of bitter grief?