

Chapter III

In Which Certain Other Persons Are Introduced; On The Same Terms As In The Last Chapter

Mention has been already made more than once, of a certain Dragon who swung and creaked complainingly before the village alehouse door. A faded, and an ancient dragon he was; and many a wintry storm of rain, snow, sleet, and hail, had changed his colour from a gaudy blue to a faint lack-lustre shade of grey. But there he hung; rearing, in a state of monstrous imbecility, on his hind legs; waxing, with every month that passed, so much more dim and shapeless, that as you gazed at him on one side of the sign-board it seemed as if he must be gradually melting through it, and coming out upon the other.

He was a courteous and considerate dragon, too; or had been in his distincter days; for in the midst of his rampant feebleness, he kept one of his forepaws near his nose, as though he would say, 'Don't mind me - it's only my fun;' while he held out the other in polite and hospitable entreaty. Indeed it must be conceded to the whole brood of dragons of modern times, that they have made a great advance in civilisation and refinement. They no longer demand a beautiful virgin for breakfast every morning, with as much regularity as any tame single gentleman expects his hot roll, but rest content with the society of idle bachelors and roving married men; and they are now remarkable rather for holding aloof from the softer sex and discouraging their visits (especially on Saturday nights), than for rudely insisting on their company without any reference to their inclinations, as they are known to have done in days of yore.

Nor is this tribute to the reclaimed animals in question so wide a digression into the realms of Natural History as it may, at first sight, appear to be; for the present business of these pages in with the dragon who had his retreat in Mr Pecksniff's neighbourhood, and that courteous animal being already on the carpet, there is nothing in the way of its immediate transaction.

For many years, then, he had swung and creaked, and flapped himself about, before the two windows of the best bedroom of that house of entertainment to which he lent his name; but never in all his swinging, creaking, and flapping, had there been such a stir within its dingy precincts, as on the evening next after that upon which the incidents, detailed in the last chapter occurred; when there was such a hurrying up and down stairs of feet, such a glancing of lights, such a whispering of voices, such a smoking and sputtering of wood newly lighted in a damp chimney, such an airing of linen, such a scorching smell of hot warming-pans, such a domestic bustle and to-do, in short, as never dragon, griffin, unicorn, or other animal of that species

presided over, since they first began to interest themselves in household affairs.

An old gentleman and a young lady, travelling, unattended, in a rusty old chariot with post-horses; coming nobody knew whence and going nobody knew whither; had turned out of the high road, and driven unexpectedly to the Blue Dragon; and here was the old gentleman, who had taken this step by reason of his sudden illness in the carriage, suffering the most horrible cramps and spasms, yet protesting and vowing in the very midst of his pain, that he wouldn't have a doctor sent for, and wouldn't take any remedies but those which the young lady administered from a small medicine-chest, and wouldn't, in a word, do anything but terrify the landlady out of her five wits, and obstinately refuse compliance with every suggestion that was made to him.

Of all the five hundred proposals for his relief which the good woman poured out in less than half an hour, he would entertain but one. That was that he should go to bed. And it was in the preparation of his bed and the arrangement of his chamber, that all the stir was made in the room behind the Dragon.

He was, beyond all question, very ill, and suffered exceedingly; not the less, perhaps, because he was a strong and vigorous old man, with a will of iron, and a voice of brass. But neither the apprehensions which he plainly entertained, at times, for his life, nor the great pain he underwent, influenced his resolution in the least degree. He would have no person sent for. The worse he grew, the more rigid and inflexible he became in his determination. If they sent for any person to attend him, man, woman, or child, he would leave the house directly (so he told them), though he quitted it on foot, and died upon the threshold of the door.

Now, there being no medical practitioner actually resident in the village, but a poor apothecary who was also a grocer and general dealer, the landlady had, upon her own responsibility, sent for him, in the very first burst and outset of the disaster. Of course it followed, as a necessary result of his being wanted, that he was not at home. He had gone some miles away, and was not expected home until late at night; so the landlady, being by this time pretty well beside herself, dispatched the same messenger in all haste for Mr Pecksniff, as a learned man who could bear a deal of responsibility, and a moral man who could administer a world of comfort to a troubled mind. That her guest had need of some efficient services under the latter head was obvious enough from the restless expressions, importing, however, rather a worldly than a spiritual anxiety, to which he gave frequent utterance.

From this last-mentioned secret errand, the messenger returned with no better news than from the first; Mr Pecksniff was not at home. However, they got the patient into bed without him; and in the course of two hours, he gradually became so far better that there were much longer intervals than at first between his terms of suffering. By degrees, he ceased to suffer at all; though his exhaustion was occasionally so great that it suggested hardly less alarm than his actual endurance had done.

It was in one of his intervals of repose, when, looking round with great caution, and reaching uneasily out of his nest of pillows, he endeavoured, with a strange air of secrecy and distrust, to make use of the writing materials which he had ordered to be placed on a table beside him, that the young lady and the mistress of the Blue Dragon found themselves sitting side by side before the fire in the sick chamber.

The mistress of the Blue Dragon was in outward appearance just what a landlady should be: broad, buxom, comfortable, and good looking, with a face of clear red and white, which, by its jovial aspect, at once bore testimony to her hearty participation in the good things of the larder and cellar, and to their thriving and healthful influences. She was a widow, but years ago had passed through her state of weeds, and burst into flower again; and in full bloom she had continued ever since; and in full bloom she was now; with roses on her ample skirts, and roses on her bodice, roses in her cap, roses in her cheeks, - aye, and roses, worth the gathering too, on her lips, for that matter. She had still a bright black eye, and jet black hair; was comely, dimpled, plump, and tight as a gooseberry; and though she was not exactly what the world calls young, you may make an affidavit, on trust, before any mayor or magistrate in Christendom, that there are a great many young ladies in the world (blessings on them one and all!) whom you wouldn't like half as well, or admire half as much, as the beaming hostess of the Blue Dragon.

As this fair matron sat beside the fire, she glanced occasionally with all the pride of ownership, about the room; which was a large apartment, such as one may see in country places, with a low roof and a sunken flooring, all downhill from the door, and a descent of two steps on the inside so exquisitely unexpected, that strangers, despite the most elaborate cautioning, usually dived in head first, as into a plunging-bath. It was none of your frivolous and preposterously bright bedrooms, where nobody can close an eye with any kind of propriety or decent regard to the association of ideas; but it was a good, dull, leaden, drowsy place, where every article of furniture reminded you that you came there to sleep, and that you were expected to go to sleep. There was no wakeful reflection of the fire there, as in your modern chambers, which upon the darkest nights

have a watchful consciousness of French polish; the old Spanish mahogany winked at it now and then, as a dozing cat or dog might, nothing more. The very size and shape, and hopeless immovability of the bedstead, and wardrobe, and in a minor degree of even the chairs and tables, provoked sleep; they were plainly apoplectic and disposed to snore. There were no staring portraits to remonstrate with you for being lazy; no round-eyed birds upon the curtains, disgustingly wide awake, and insufferably prying. The thick neutral hangings, and the dark blinds, and the heavy heap of bed-clothes, were all designed to hold in sleep, and act as nonconductors to the day and getting up. Even the old stuffed fox upon the top of the wardrobe was devoid of any spark of vigilance, for his glass eye had fallen out, and he slumbered as he stood.

The wandering attention of the mistress of the Blue Dragon roved to these things but twice or thrice, and then for but an instant at a time. It soon deserted them, and even the distant bed with its strange burden, for the young creature immediately before her, who, with her downcast eyes intently fixed upon the fire, sat wrapped in silent meditation.

She was very young; apparently no more than seventeen; timid and shrinking in her manner, and yet with a greater share of self possession and control over her emotions than usually belongs to a far more advanced period of female life. This she had abundantly shown, but now, in her tending of the sick gentleman. She was short in stature; and her figure was slight, as became her years; but all the charms of youth and maidenhood set it off, and clustered on her gentle brow. Her face was very pale, in part no doubt from recent agitation. Her dark brown hair, disordered from the same cause, had fallen negligently from its bonds, and hung upon her neck; for which instance of its waywardness no male observer would have had the heart to blame it.

Her attire was that of a lady, but extremely plain; and in her manner, even when she sat as still as she did then, there was an indefinable something which appeared to be in kindred with her scrupulously unpretending dress. She had sat, at first looking anxiously towards the bed; but seeing that the patient remained quiet, and was busy with his writing, she had softly moved her chair into its present place; partly, as it seemed, from an instinctive consciousness that he desired to avoid observation; and partly that she might, unseen by him, give some vent to the natural feelings she had hitherto suppressed.

Of all this, and much more, the rosy landlady of the Blue Dragon took as accurate note and observation as only woman can take of woman. And at length she said, in a voice too low, she knew, to reach the bed:

'You have seen the gentleman in this way before, miss? Is he used to these attacks?'

'I have seen him very ill before, but not so ill as he has been tonight.'

'What a Providence!' said the landlady of the Dragon, 'that you had the prescriptions and the medicines with you, miss!'

'They are intended for such an emergency. We never travel without them.'

'Oh!' thought the hostess, 'then we are in the habit of travelling, and of travelling together.'

She was so conscious of expressing this in her face, that meeting the young lady's eyes immediately afterwards, and being a very honest hostess, she was rather confused.

'The gentleman - your grandpapa' - she resumed, after a short pause, 'being so bent on having no assistance, must terrify you very much, miss?'

'I have been very much alarmed to-night. He - he is not my grandfather.'

'Father, I should have said,' returned the hostess, sensible of having made an awkward mistake.

'Nor my father' said the young lady. 'Nor,' she added, slightly smiling with a quick perception of what the landlady was going to add, 'Nor my uncle. We are not related.'

'Oh dear me!' returned the landlady, still more embarrassed than before; 'how could I be so very much mistaken; knowing, as anybody in their proper senses might that when a gentleman is ill, he looks so much older than he really is? That I should have called you 'Miss,' too, ma'am!' But when she had proceeded thus far, she glanced involuntarily at the third finger of the young lady's left hand, and faltered again; for there was no ring upon it.

'When I told you we were not related,' said the other mildly, but not without confusion on her own part, 'I meant not in any way. Not even by marriage. Did you call me, Martin?'

'Call you?' cried the old man, looking quickly up, and hurriedly drawing beneath the coverlet the paper on which he had been writing. 'No.'

She had moved a pace or two towards the bed, but stopped immediately, and went no farther.

'No,' he repeated, with a petulant emphasis. 'Why do you ask me? If I had called you, what need for such a question?'

'It was the creaking of the sign outside, sir, I dare say,' observed the landlady; a suggestion by the way (as she felt a moment after she had made it), not at all complimentary to the voice of the old gentleman.

'No matter what, ma'am,' he rejoined: 'it wasn't I. Why how you stand there, Mary, as if I had the plague! But they're all afraid of me,' he added, leaning helplessly backward on his pillow; 'even she! There is a curse upon me. What else have I to look for?'

'Oh dear, no. Oh no, I'm sure,' said the good-tempered landlady, rising, and going towards him. 'Be of better cheer, sir. These are only sick fancies.'

'What are only sick fancies?' he retorted. 'What do you know about fancies? Who told you about fancies? The old story! Fancies!'

'Only see again there, how you take one up!' said the mistress of the Blue Dragon, with unimpaired good humour. 'Dear heart alive, there is no harm in the word, sir, if it is an old one. Folks in good health have their fancies, too, and strange ones, every day.'

Harmless as this speech appeared to be, it acted on the traveller's distrust, like oil on fire. He raised his head up in the bed, and, fixing on her two dark eyes whose brightness was exaggerated by the paleness of his hollow cheeks, as they in turn, together with his straggling locks of long grey hair, were rendered whiter by the tight black velvet skullcap which he wore, he searched her face intently.

'Ah! you begin too soon,' he said, in so low a voice that he seemed to be thinking it, rather than addressing her. 'But you lose no time. You do your errand, and you earn your fee. Now, who may be your client?'

The landlady looked in great astonishment at her whom he called Mary, and finding no rejoinder in the drooping face, looked back again at him. At first she had recoiled involuntarily, supposing him disordered in his mind; but the slow composure of his manner, and the settled purpose announced in his strong features, and gathering, most of all, about his puckered mouth, forbade the supposition.

'Come,' he said, 'tell me who is it? Being here, it is not very hard for me to guess, you may suppose.'

'Martin,' interposed the young lady, laying her hand upon his arm; 'reflect how short a time we have been in this house, and that even your name is unknown here.'

'Unless,' he said, 'you - ' He was evidently tempted to express a suspicion of her having broken his confidence in favour of the landlady, but either remembering her tender nursing, or being moved in some sort by her face, he checked himself, and changing his uneasy posture in the bed, was silent.

'There!' said Mrs Lupin; for in that name the Blue Dragon was licensed to furnish entertainment, both to man and beast. 'Now, you will be well again, sir. You forgot, for the moment, that there were none but friends here.'

'Oh!' cried the old man, moaning impatiently, as he tossed one restless arm upon the coverlet; 'why do you talk to me of friends! Can you or anybody teach me to know who are my friends, and who my enemies?'

'At least,' urged Mrs Lupin, gently, 'this young lady is your friend, I am sure.'

'She has no temptation to be otherwise,' cried the old man, like one whose hope and confidence were utterly exhausted. 'I suppose she is. Heaven knows. There, let me try to sleep. Leave the candle where it is.'

As they retired from the bed, he drew forth the writing which had occupied him so long, and holding it in the flame of the taper burnt it to ashes. That done, he extinguished the light, and turning his face away with a heavy sigh, drew the coverlet about his head, and lay quite still.

This destruction of the paper, both as being strangely inconsistent with the labour he had devoted to it, and as involving considerable danger of fire to the Dragon, occasioned Mrs Lupin not a little consternation. But the young lady evincing no surprise, curiosity, or alarm, whispered her, with many thanks for her solicitude and company, that she would remain there some time longer; and that she begged her not to share her watch, as she was well used to being alone, and would pass the time in reading.

Mrs Lupin had her full share and dividend of that large capital of curiosity which is inherited by her sex, and at another time it might have been difficult so to impress this hint upon her as to induce her to take it. But now, in sheer wonder and amazement at these mysteries, she withdrew at once, and repairing straightway to her own little parlour below stairs, sat down in her easy-chair with unnatural composure. At this very crisis, a step was heard in the entry, and Mr

Pecksniff, looking sweetly over the half-door of the bar, and into the vista of snug privacy beyond, murmured:

'Good evening, Mrs Lupin!'

'Oh dear me, sir!' she cried, advancing to receive him, 'I am so very glad you have come.'

'And I am very glad I have come,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'if I can be of service. I am very glad I have come. What is the matter, Mrs Lupin?'

'A gentleman taken ill upon the road, has been so very bad upstairs, sir,' said the tearful hostess.

'A gentleman taken ill upon the road, has been so very bad upstairs, has he?' repeated Mr Pecksniff. 'Well, well!'

Now there was nothing that one may call decidedly original in this remark, nor can it be exactly said to have contained any wise precept theretofore unknown to mankind, or to have opened any hidden source of consolation; but Mr Pecksniff's manner was so bland, and he nodded his head so soothingly, and showed in everything such an affable sense of his own excellence, that anybody would have been, as Mrs Lupin was, comforted by the mere voice and presence of such a man; and, though he had merely said 'a verb must agree with its nominative case in number and person, my good friend,' or 'eight times eight are sixty-four, my worthy soul,' must have felt deeply grateful to him for his humanity and wisdom.

'And how,' asked Mr Pecksniff, drawing off his gloves and warming his hands before the fire, as benevolently as if they were somebody else's, not his; 'and how is he now?'

'He is better, and quite tranquil,' answered Mrs Lupin.

'He is better, and quite tranquil,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Very well! Ve-ry well!'

Here again, though the statement was Mrs Lupin's and not Mr Pecksniff's, Mr Pecksniff made it his own and consoled her with it. It was not much when Mrs Lupin said it, but it was a whole book when Mr Pecksniff said it. 'I observe,' he seemed to say, 'and through me, morality in general remarks, that he is better and quite tranquil.'

'There must be weighty matters on his mind, though,' said the hostess, shaking her head, 'for he talks, sir, in the strangest way you ever heard. He is far from easy in his thoughts, and wants some proper advice from those whose goodness makes it worth his having.'

'Then,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'he is the sort of customer for me.' But though he said this in the plainest language, he didn't speak a word. He only shook his head; disparagingly of himself too.

'I am afraid, sir,' continued the landlady, first looking round to assure herself that there was nobody within hearing, and then looking down upon the floor. 'I am very much afraid, sir, that his conscience is troubled by his not being related to - or - or even married to - a very young lady - '

'Mrs Lupin!' said Mr Pecksniff, holding up his hand with something in his manner as nearly approaching to severity as any expression of his, mild being that he was, could ever do. 'Person! young person?'

'A very young person,' said Mrs Lupin, curtsying and blushing; ' - I beg your pardon, sir, but I have been so hurried to-night, that I don't know what I say - who is with him now.'

'Who is with him now,' ruminated Mr Pecksniff, warming his back (as he had warmed his hands) as if it were a widow's back, or an orphan's back, or an enemy's back, or a back that any less excellent man would have suffered to be cold. 'Oh dear me, dear me!'

'At the same time I am bound to say, and I do say with all my heart,' observed the hostess, earnestly, 'that her looks and manner almost disarm suspicion.'

'Your suspicion, Mrs Lupin,' said Mr Pecksniff gravely, 'is very natural.'

Touching which remark, let it be written down to their confusion, that the enemies of this worthy man unblushingly maintained that he always said of what was very bad, that it was very natural; and that he unconsciously betrayed his own nature in doing so.

'Your suspicion, Mrs Lupin,' he repeated, 'is very natural, and I have no doubt correct. I will wait upon these travellers.'

With that he took off his great-coat, and having run his fingers through his hair, thrust one hand gently in the bosom of his waist-coat and meekly signed to her to lead the way.

'Shall I knock?' asked Mrs Lupin, when they reached the chamber door.

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'enter if you please.'

They went in on tiptoe; or rather the hostess took that precaution for Mr Pecksniff always walked softly. The old gentleman was still asleep, and his young companion still sat reading by the fire.

'I am afraid,' said Mr Pecksniff, pausing at the door, and giving his head a melancholy roll, 'I am afraid that this looks artful. I am afraid, Mrs Lupin, do you know, that this looks very artful!'

As he finished this whisper, he advanced before the hostess; and at the same time the young lady, hearing footsteps, rose. Mr Pecksniff glanced at the volume she held, and whispered Mrs Lupin again; if possible, with increased despondency.

'Yes, ma'am,' he said, 'it is a good book. I was fearful of that beforehand. I am apprehensive that this is a very deep thing indeed!'

'What gentleman is this?' inquired the object of his virtuous doubts.

'Hush! don't trouble yourself, ma'am,' said Mr Pecksniff, as the landlady was about to answer. 'This young' - in spite of himself he hesitated when 'person' rose to his lips, and substituted another word: 'this young stranger, Mrs Lupin, will excuse me for replying briefly, that I reside in this village; it may be in an influential manner, however, undeserved; and that I have been summoned here by you. I am here, as I am everywhere, I hope, in sympathy for the sick and sorry.'

With these impressive words, Mr Pecksniff passed over to the bedside, where, after patting the counterpane once or twice in a very solemn manner, as if by that means he gained a clear insight into the patient's disorder, he took his seat in a large arm-chair, and in an attitude of some thoughtfulness and much comfort, waited for his waking. Whatever objection the young lady urged to Mrs Lupin went no further, for nothing more was said to Mr Pecksniff, and Mr Pecksniff said nothing more to anybody else.

Full half an hour elapsed before the old man stirred, but at length he turned himself in bed, and, though not yet awake, gave tokens that his sleep was drawing to an end. By little and little he removed the bed-clothes from about his head, and turned still more towards the side where Mr Pecksniff sat. In course of time his eyes opened; and he lay for a few moments as people newly roused sometimes will, gazing indolently at his visitor, without any distinct consciousness of his presence.

There was nothing remarkable in these proceedings, except the influence they worked on Mr Pecksniff, which could hardly have been surpassed by the most marvellous of natural phenomena. Gradually

his hands became tightly clasped upon the elbows of the chair, his eyes dilated with surprise, his mouth opened, his hair stood more erect upon his forehead than its custom was, until, at length, when the old man rose in bed, and stared at him with scarcely less emotion than he showed himself, the Pecksniff doubts were all resolved, and he exclaimed aloud:

'You ARE Martin Chuzzlewit!'

His consternation of surprise was so genuine, that the old man, with all the disposition that he clearly entertained to believe it assumed, was convinced of its reality.

'I am Martin Chuzzlewit,' he said, bitterly: 'and Martin Chuzzlewit wishes you had been hanged, before you had come here to disturb him in his sleep. Why, I dreamed of this fellow!' he said, lying down again, and turning away his face, 'before I knew that he was near me!'

'My good cousin - ' said Mr Pecksniff.

'There! His very first words!' cried the old man, shaking his grey head to and fro upon the pillow, and throwing up his hands. 'In his very first words he asserts his relationship! I knew he would; they all do it! Near or distant, blood or water, it's all one. Ugh! What a calendar of deceit, and lying, and false-witnessing, the sound of any word of kindred opens before me!'

'Pray do not be hasty, Mr Chuzzlewit,' said Pecksniff, in a tone that was at once in the sublimest degree compassionate and dispassionate; for he had by this time recovered from his surprise, and was in full possession of his virtuous self. 'You will regret being hasty, I know you will.'

'You know!' said Martin, contemptuously.

'Yes,' retorted Mr Pecksniff. 'Aye, aye, Mr Chuzzlewit; and don't imagine that I mean to court or flatter you; for nothing is further from my intention. Neither, sir, need you entertain the least misgiving that I shall repeat that obnoxious word which has given you so much offence already. Why should I? What do I expect or want from you? There is nothing in your possession that I know of, Mr Chuzzlewit, which is much to be coveted for the happiness it brings you.'

'That's true enough,' muttered the old man.

'Apart from that consideration,' said Mr Pecksniff, watchful of the effect he made, 'it must be plain to you (I am sure) by this time, that if I had wished to insinuate myself into your good opinion, I should have

been, of all things, careful not to address you as a relative; knowing your humour, and being quite certain beforehand that I could not have a worse letter of recommendation.'

Martin made not any verbal answer; but he as clearly implied though only by a motion of his legs beneath the bed-clothes, that there was reason in this, and that he could not dispute it, as if he had said as much in good set terms.

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff, keeping his hand in his waistcoat as though he were ready, on the shortest notice, to produce his heart for Martin Chuzzlewit's inspection, 'I came here to offer my services to a stranger. I make no offer of them to you, because I know you would distrust me if I did. But lying on that bed, sir, I regard you as a stranger, and I have just that amount of interest in you which I hope I should feel in any stranger, circumstanced as you are. Beyond that, I am quite as indifferent to you, Mr Chuzzlewit, as you are to me.'

Having said which, Mr Pecksniff threw himself back in the easy-chair; so radiant with ingenuous honesty, that Mrs Lupin almost wondered not to see a stained-glass Glory, such as the Saint wore in the church, shining about his head.

A long pause succeeded. The old man, with increased restlessness, changed his posture several times. Mrs Lupin and the young lady gazed in silence at the counterpane. Mr Pecksniff toyed abstractedly with his eye-glass, and kept his eyes shut, that he might ruminate the better.

'Eh?' he said at last, opening them suddenly, and looking towards the bed. 'I beg your pardon. I thought you spoke. Mrs Lupin,' he continued, slowly rising 'I am not aware that I can be of any service to you here. The gentleman is better, and you are as good a nurse as he can have. Eh?'

This last note of interrogation bore reference to another change of posture on the old man's part, which brought his face towards Mr Pecksniff for the first time since he had turned away from him.

'If you desire to speak to me before I go, sir,' continued that gentleman, after another pause, 'you may command my leisure; but I must stipulate, in justice to myself, that you do so as to a stranger, strictly as to a stranger.'

Now if Mr Pecksniff knew, from anything Martin Chuzzlewit had expressed in gestures, that he wanted to speak to him, he could only have found it out on some such principle as prevails in melodramas, and in virtue of which the elderly farmer with the comic son always

knows what the dumb girl means when she takes refuge in his garden, and relates her personal memoirs in incomprehensible pantomime. But without stopping to make any inquiry on this point, Martin Chuzzlewit signed to his young companion to withdraw, which she immediately did, along with the landlady leaving him and Mr Pecksniff alone together. For some time they looked at each other in silence; or rather the old man looked at Mr Pecksniff, and Mr Pecksniff again closing his eyes on all outward objects, took an inward survey of his own breast. That it amply repaid him for his trouble, and afforded a delicious and enchanting prospect, was clear from the expression of his face.

'You wish me to speak to you as to a total stranger,' said the old man, 'do you?'

Mr Pecksniff replied, by a shrug of his shoulders and an apparent turning round of his eyes in their sockets before he opened them, that he was still reduced to the necessity of entertaining that desire.

'You shall be gratified,' said Martin. 'Sir, I am a rich man. Not so rich as some suppose, perhaps, but yet wealthy. I am not a miser sir, though even that charge is made against me, as I hear, and currently believed. I have no pleasure in hoarding. I have no pleasure in the possession of money, The devil that we call by that name can give me nothing but unhappiness.'

It would be no description of Mr Pecksniff's gentleness of manner to adopt the common parlance, and say that he looked at this moment as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. He rather looked as if any quantity of butter might have been made out of him, by churning the milk of human kindness, as it spouted upwards from his heart.

'For the same reason that I am not a hoarder of money,' said the old man, 'I am not lavish of it. Some people find their gratification in storing it up; and others theirs in parting with it; but I have no gratification connected with the thing. Pain and bitterness are the only goods it ever could procure for me. I hate it. It is a spectre walking before me through the world, and making every social pleasure hideous.'

A thought arose in Pecksniff's mind, which must have instantly mounted to his face, or Martin Chuzzlewit would not have resumed as quickly and as sternly as he did:

'You would advise me for my peace of mind, to get rid of this source of misery, and transfer it to some one who could bear it better. Even you, perhaps, would rid me of a burden under which I suffer so grievously. But, kind stranger,' said the old man, whose every feature darkened

as he spoke, 'good Christian stranger, that is a main part of my trouble. In other hands, I have known money do good; in other hands I have known it triumphed in, and boasted of with reason, as the master-key to all the brazen gates that close upon the paths to worldly honour, fortune, and enjoyment. To what man or woman; to what worthy, honest, incorruptible creature; shall I confide such a talisman, either now or when I die? Do you know any such person? YOUR virtues are of course inestimable, but can you tell me of any other living creature who will bear the test of contact with myself?'

'Of contact with yourself, sir?' echoed Mr Pecksniff.

'Aye,' returned the old man, 'the test of contact with me - with me. You have heard of him whose misery (the gratification of his own foolish wish) was, that he turned every thing he touched into gold. The curse of my existence, and the realisation of my own mad desire is that by the golden standard which I bear about me, I am doomed to try the metal of all other men, and find it false and hollow.'

Mr Pecksniff shook his head, and said, 'You think so.'

'Oh yes,' cried the old man, 'I think so! and in your telling me 'I think so,' I recognize the true unworldly ring of YOUR metal. I tell you, man,' he added, with increasing bitterness, 'that I have gone, a rich man, among people of all grades and kinds; relatives, friends, and strangers; among people in whom, when I was poor, I had confidence, and justly, for they never once deceived me then, or, to me, wronged each other. But I have never found one nature, no, not one, in which, being wealthy and alone, I was not forced to detect the latent corruption that lay hid within it waiting for such as I to bring it forth. Treachery, deceit, and low design; hatred of competitors, real or fancied, for my favour; meanness, falsehood, baseness, and servility; or,' and here he looked closely in his cousin's eyes, 'or an assumption of honest independence, almost worse than all; these are the beauties which my wealth has brought to light. Brother against brother, child against parent, friends treading on the faces of friends, this is the social company by whom my way has been attended. There are stories told - they may be true or false - of rich men who, in the garb of poverty, have found out virtue and rewarded it. They were dolts and idiots for their pains. They should have made the search in their own characters. They should have shown themselves fit objects to be robbed and preyed upon and plotted against and adulated by any knaves, who, but for joy, would have spat upon their coffins when they died their dupes; and then their search would have ended as mine has done, and they would be what I am.'

Mr Pecksniff, not at all knowing what it might be best to say in the momentary pause which ensued upon these remarks, made an

elaborate demonstration of intending to deliver something very oracular indeed; trusting to the certainty of the old man interrupting him, before he should utter a word. Nor was he mistaken, for Martin Chuzzlewit having taken breath, went on to say:

'Hear me to an end; judge what profit you are like to gain from any repetition of this visit; and leave me. I have so corrupted and changed the nature of all those who have ever attended on me, by breeding avaricious plots and hopes within them; I have engendered such domestic strife and discord, by tarrying even with members of my own family; I have been such a lighted torch in peaceful homes, kindling up all the inflammable gases and vapours in their moral atmosphere, which, but for me, might have proved harmless to the end, that I have, I may say, fled from all who knew me, and taking refuge in secret places have lived, of late, the life of one who is hunted. The young girl whom you just now saw - what! your eye lightens when I talk of her! You hate her already, do you?'

'Upon my word, sir!' said Mr Pecksniff, laying his hand upon his breast, and dropping his eyelids.

'I forgot,' cried the old man, looking at him with a keenness which the other seemed to feel, although he did not raise his eyes so as to see it. 'I ask your pardon. I forgot you were a stranger. For the moment you reminded me of one Pecksniff, a cousin of mine. As I was saying - the young girl whom you just now saw, is an orphan child, whom, with one steady purpose, I have bred and educated, or, if you prefer the word, adopted. For a year or more she has been my constant companion, and she is my only one. I have taken, as she knows, a solemn oath never to leave her sixpence when I die, but while I live I make her an annual allowance; not extravagant in its amount and yet not stinted. There is a compact between us that no term of affectionate cajolery shall ever be addressed by either to the other, but that she shall call me always by my Christian name; I her, by hers. She is bound to me in life by ties of interest, and losing by my death, and having no expectation disappointed, will mourn it, perhaps; though for that I care little. This is the only kind of friend I have or will have. Judge from such premises what a profitable hour you have spent in coming here, and leave me, to return no more.'

With these words, the old man fell slowly back upon his pillow. Mr Pecksniff as slowly rose, and, with a prefatory hem, began as follows:

'Mr Chuzzlewit.'

'There. Go!' interposed the other. 'Enough of this. I am weary of you.'

'I am sorry for that, sir,' rejoined Mr Pecksniff, 'because I have a duty to discharge, from which, depend upon it, I shall not shrink. No, sir, I shall not shrink.'

It is a lamentable fact, that as Mr Pecksniff stood erect beside the bed, in all the dignity of Goodness, and addressed him thus, the old man cast an angry glance towards the candlestick, as if he were possessed by a strong inclination to launch it at his cousin's head. But he constrained himself, and pointing with his finger to the door, informed him that his road lay there.

'Thank you,' said Mr Pecksniff; 'I am aware of that. I am going. But before I go, I crave your leave to speak, and more than that, Mr Chuzzlewit, I must and will - yes indeed, I repeat it, must and will - be heard. I am not surprised, sir, at anything you have told me tonight. It is natural, very natural, and the greater part of it was known to me before. I will not say,' continued Mr Pecksniff, drawing out his pocket-handkerchief, and winking with both eyes at once, as it were, against his will, 'I will not say that you are mistaken in me. While you are in your present mood I would not say so for the world. I almost wish, indeed, that I had a different nature, that I might repress even this slight confession of weakness; which I cannot disguise from you; which I feel is humiliating; but which you will have the goodness to excuse. We will say, if you please,' added Mr Pecksniff, with great tenderness of manner, 'that it arises from a cold in the head, or is attributable to snuff, or smelling-salts, or onions, or anything but the real cause.'

Here he paused for an instant, and concealed his face behind his pocket-handkerchief. Then, smiling faintly, and holding the bed furniture with one hand, he resumed:

'But, Mr Chuzzlewit, while I am forgetful of myself, I owe it to myself, and to my character - aye, sir, and I HAVE a character which is very dear to me, and will be the best inheritance of my two daughters - to tell you, on behalf of another, that your conduct is wrong, unnatural, indefensible, monstrous. And I tell you, sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, towering on tiptoe among the curtains, as if he were literally rising above all worldly considerations, and were fain to hold on tight, to keep himself from darting skyward like a rocket, 'I tell you without fear or favour, that it will not do for you to be unmindful of your grandson, young Martin, who has the strongest natural claim upon you. It will not do, sir,' repeated Mr Pecksniff, shaking his head. 'You may think it will do, but it won't. You must provide for that young man; you shall provide for him; you WILL provide for him. I believe,' said Mr Pecksniff, glancing at the pen-and-ink, 'that in secret you have already done so. Bless you for doing so. Bless you for doing right, sir. Bless you for hating me. And good night!'

So saying, Mr Pecksniff waved his right hand with much solemnity, and once more inserting it in his waistcoat, departed. There was emotion in his manner, but his step was firm. Subject to human weaknesses, he was upheld by conscience.

Martin lay for some time, with an expression on his face of silent wonder, not unmixed with rage; at length he muttered in a whisper:

'What does this mean? Can the false-hearted boy have chosen such a tool as yonder fellow who has just gone out? Why not! He has conspired against me, like the rest, and they are but birds of one feather. A new plot; a new plot! Oh self, self, self! At every turn nothing but self!'

He fell to trifling, as he ceased to speak, with the ashes of the burnt paper in the candlestick. He did so, at first, in pure abstraction, but they presently became the subject of his thoughts.

'Another will made and destroyed,' he said, 'nothing determined on, nothing done, and I might have died to-night! I plainly see to what foul uses all this money will be put at last,' he cried, almost writhing in the bed; 'after filling me with cares and miseries all my life, it will perpetuate discord and bad passions when I am dead. So it always is. What lawsuits grow out of the graves of rich men, every day; sowing perjury, hatred, and lies among near kindred, where there should be nothing but love! Heaven help us, we have much to answer for! Oh self, self, self! Every man for himself, and no creature for me!'

Universal self! Was there nothing of its shadow in these reflections, and in the history of Martin Chuzzlewit, on his own showing?