

Chapter IV

From Which It Will Appear That If Union Be Strength, And Family Affection Be Pleasant To Contemplate, The Chuzzlewits Were The Strongest And Most Agreeable Family In The World

That worthy man Mr Pecksniff having taken leave of his cousin in the solemn terms recited in the last chapter, withdrew to his own home, and remained there three whole days; not so much as going out for a walk beyond the boundaries of his own garden, lest he should be hastily summoned to the bedside of his penitent and remorseful relative, whom, in his ample benevolence, he had made up his mind to forgive unconditionally, and to love on any terms. But such was the obstinacy and such the bitter nature of that stern old man, that no repentant summons came; and the fourth day found Mr Pecksniff apparently much farther from his Christian object than the first.

During the whole of this interval, he haunted the Dragon at all times and seasons in the day and night, and, returning good for evil evinced the deepest solicitude in the progress of the obdurate invalid, in so much that Mrs Lupin was fairly melted by his disinterested anxiety (for he often particularly required her to take notice that he would do the same by any stranger or pauper in the like condition), and shed many tears of admiration and delight.

Meantime, old Martin Chuzzlewit remained shut up in his own chamber, and saw no person but his young companion, saving the hostess of the Blue Dragon, who was, at certain times, admitted to his presence. So surely as she came into the room, however, Martin feigned to fall asleep. It was only when he and the young lady were alone, that he would utter a word, even in answer to the simplest inquiry; though Mr Pecksniff could make out, by hard listening at the door, that they two being left together, he was talkative enough.

It happened on the fourth evening, that Mr Pecksniff walking, as usual, into the bar of the Dragon and finding no Mrs Lupin there, went straight upstairs; purposing, in the fervour of his affectionate zeal, to apply his ear once more to the keyhole, and quiet his mind by assuring himself that the hard-hearted patient was going on well. It happened that Mr Pecksniff, coming softly upon the dark passage into which a spiral ray of light usually darted through the same keyhole, was astonished to find no such ray visible; and it happened that Mr Pecksniff, when he had felt his way to the chamber-door, stooping hurriedly down to ascertain by personal inspection whether the jealousy of the old man had caused this keyhole to be stopped on the inside, brought his head into such violent contact with another head that he could not help uttering in an audible voice the monosyllable 'Oh!' which was, as it were, sharply unscrewed and jerked out of him

by very anguish. It happened then, and lastly, that Mr Pecksniff found himself immediately collared by something which smelt like several damp umbrellas, a barrel of beer, a cask of warm brandy-and-water, and a small parlour-full of stale tobacco smoke, mixed; and was straightway led downstairs into the bar from which he had lately come, where he found himself standing opposite to, and in the grasp of, a perfectly strange gentleman of still stranger appearance who, with his disengaged hand, rubbed his own head very hard, and looked at him, Pecksniff, with an evil countenance.

The gentleman was of that order of appearance which is currently termed shabby-genteel, though in respect of his dress he can hardly be said to have been in any extremities, as his fingers were a long way out of his gloves, and the soles of his feet were at an inconvenient distance from the upper leather of his boots. His nether garments were of a bluish grey - violent in its colours once, but sobered now by age and dinginess - and were so stretched and strained in a tough conflict between his braces and his straps, that they appeared every moment in danger of flying asunder at the knees. His coat, in colour blue and of a military cut, was buttoned and frogged up to his chin. His cravat was, in hue and pattern, like one of those mantles which hairdressers are accustomed to wrap about their clients, during the progress of the professional mysteries. His hat had arrived at such a pass that it would have been hard to determine whether it was originally white or black. But he wore a moustache - a shaggy moustache too; nothing in the meek and merciful way, but quite in the fierce and scornful style; the regular Satanic sort of thing - and he wore, besides, a vast quantity of unbrushed hair. He was very dirty and very jaunty; very bold and very mean; very swaggering and very slinking; very much like a man who might have been something better, and unspeakably like a man who deserved to be something worse.

'You were eaves-dropping at that door, you vagabond!' said this gentleman.

Mr Pecksniff cast him off, as Saint George might have repudiated the Dragon in that animal's last moments, and said:

'Where is Mrs Lupin, I wonder! can the good woman possibly be aware that there is a person here who - '

'Stay!' said the gentleman. 'Wait a bit. She DOES know. What then?'

'What then, sir?' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'What then? Do you know, sir, that I am the friend and relative of that sick gentleman? That I am his protector, his guardian, his - '

'Not his niece's husband,' interposed the stranger, 'I'll be sworn; for he was there before you.'

'What do you mean?' said Mr Pecksniff, with indignant surprise. 'What do you tell me, sir?'

'Wait a bit!' cried the other, 'Perhaps you are a cousin - the cousin who lives in this place?'

'I AM the cousin who lives in this place,' replied the man of worth.

'Your name is Pecksniff?' said the gentleman.

'It is.'

'I am proud to know you, and I ask your pardon,' said the gentleman, touching his hat, and subsequently diving behind his cravat for a shirt-collar, which however he did not succeed in bringing to the surface. 'You behold in me, sir, one who has also an interest in that gentleman upstairs. Wait a bit.'

As he said this, he touched the tip of his high nose, by way of intimation that he would let Mr Pecksniff into a secret presently; and pulling off his hat, began to search inside the crown among a mass of crumpled documents and small pieces of what may be called the bark of broken cigars; whence he presently selected the cover of an old letter, begrimed with dirt and redolent of tobacco.

'Read that,' he cried, giving it to Mr Pecksniff.

'This is addressed to Chevy Slyme, Esquire,' said that gentleman.

'You know Chevy Slyme, Esquire, I believe?' returned the stranger.

Mr Pecksniff shrugged his shoulders as though he would say 'I know there is such a person, and I am sorry for it.'

'Very good,' remarked the gentleman. 'That is my interest and business here.' With that he made another dive for his shirt-collar and brought up a string.

'Now, this is very distressing, my friend,' said Mr Pecksniff, shaking his head and smiling composedly. 'It is very distressing to me, to be compelled to say that you are not the person you claim to be. I know Mr Slyme, my friend; this will not do; honesty is the best policy you had better not; you had indeed.'

'Stop' cried the gentleman, stretching forth his right arm, which was so tightly wedged into his threadbare sleeve that it looked like a cloth sausage. 'Wait a bit!'

He paused to establish himself immediately in front of the fire with his back towards it. Then gathering the skirts of his coat under his left arm, and smoothing his moustache with his right thumb and forefinger, he resumed:

'I understand your mistake, and I am not offended. Why? Because it's complimentary. You suppose I would set myself up for Chevy Slyme. Sir, if there is a man on earth whom a gentleman would feel proud and honoured to be mistaken for, that man is my friend Slyme. For he is, without an exception, the highest-minded, the most independent-spirited, most original, spiritual, classical, talented, the most thoroughly Shakspearian, if not Miltonic, and at the same time the most disgustingly-unappreciated dog I know. But, sir, I have not the vanity to attempt to pass for Slyme. Any other man in the wide world, I am equal to; but Slyme is, I frankly confess, a great many cuts above me. Therefore you are wrong.'

'I judged from this,' said Mr Pecksniff, holding out the cover of the letter.

'No doubt you did,' returned the gentleman. 'But, Mr Pecksniff, the whole thing resolves itself into an instance of the peculiarities of genius. Every man of true genius has his peculiarity. Sir, the peculiarity of my friend Slyme is, that he is always waiting round the corner. He is perpetually round the corner, sir. He is round the corner at this instant. Now,' said the gentleman, shaking his forefinger before his nose, and planting his legs wider apart as he looked attentively in Mr Pecksniff's face, 'that is a remarkably curious and interesting trait in Mr Slyme's character; and whenever Slyme's life comes to be written, that trait must be thoroughly worked out by his biographer or society will not be satisfied. Observe me, society will not be satisfied!'

Mr Pecksniff coughed.

'Slyme's biographer, sir, whoever he may be,' resumed the gentleman, 'must apply to me; or, if I am gone to that what's-his-name from which no thingumbob comes back, he must apply to my executors for leave to search among my papers. I have taken a few notes in my poor way, of some of that man's proceedings - my adopted brother, sir, - which would amaze you. He made use of an expression, sir, only on the fifteenth of last month when he couldn't meet a little bill and the other party wouldn't renew, which would have done honour to Napoleon Bonaparte in addressing the French army.'

'And pray,' asked Mr Pecksniff, obviously not quite at his ease, 'what may be Mr Slyme's business here, if I may be permitted to inquire, who am compelled by a regard for my own character to disavow all interest in his proceedings?'

'In the first place,' returned the gentleman, 'you will permit me to say, that I object to that remark, and that I strongly and indignantly protest against it on behalf of my friend Slyme. In the next place, you will give me leave to introduce myself. My name, sir, is Tigg. The name of Montague Tigg will perhaps be familiar to you, in connection with the most remarkable events of the Peninsular War?'

Mr Pecksniff gently shook his head.

'No matter,' said the gentleman. 'That man was my father, and I bear his name. I am consequently proud - proud as Lucifer. Excuse me one moment. I desire my friend Slyme to be present at the remainder of this conference.'

With this announcement he hurried away to the outer door of the Blue Dragon, and almost immediately returned with a companion shorter than himself, who was wrapped in an old blue camlet cloak with a lining of faded scarlet. His sharp features being much pinched and nipped by long waiting in the cold, and his straggling red whiskers and frowzy hair being more than usually dishevelled from the same cause, he certainly looked rather unwholesome and uncomfortable than Shakspearian or Miltonic.

'Now,' said Mr Tigg, clapping one hand on the shoulder of his prepossessing friend, and calling Mr Pecksniff's attention to him with the other, 'you two are related; and relations never did agree, and never will; which is a wise dispensation and an inevitable thing, or there would be none but family parties, and everybody in the world would bore everybody else to death. If you were on good terms, I should consider you a most confoundedly unnatural pair; but standing towards each other as you do, I took upon you as a couple of devilish deep-thoughted fellows, who may be reasoned with to any extent.'

Here Mr Chevy Slyme, whose great abilities seemed one and all to point towards the sneaking quarter of the moral compass, nudged his friend stealthily with his elbow, and whispered in his ear.

'Chiv,' said Mr Tigg aloud, in the high tone of one who was not to be tampered with. 'I shall come to that presently. I act upon my own responsibility, or not at all. To the extent of such a trifling loan as a crownpiece to a man of your talents, I look upon Mr Pecksniff as certain;' and seeing at this juncture that the expression of Mr

Pecksniff's face by no means betokened that he shared this certainty, Mr Tigg laid his finger on his nose again for that gentleman's private and especial behoof; calling upon him thereby to take notice that the requisition of small loans was another instance of the peculiarities of genius as developed in his friend Slyme; that he, Tigg, winked at the same, because of the strong metaphysical interest which these weaknesses possessed; and that in reference to his own personal advocacy of such small advances, he merely consulted the humour of his friend, without the least regard to his own advantage or necessities.

'Oh, Chiv, Chiv!' added Mr Tigg, surveying his adopted brother with an air of profound contemplation after dismissing this piece of pantomime. 'You are, upon my life, a strange instance of the little frailties that beset a mighty mind. If there had never been a telescope in the world, I should have been quite certain from my observation of you, Chiv, that there were spots on the sun! I wish I may die, if this isn't the queerest state of existence that we find ourselves forced into without knowing why or wherefore, Mr Pecksniff! Well, never mind! Moralise as we will, the world goes on. As Hamlet says, Hercules may lay about him with his club in every possible direction, but he can't prevent the cats from making a most intolerable row on the roofs of the houses, or the dogs from being shot in the hot weather if they run about the streets unmuzzled. Life's a riddle; a most infernally hard riddle to guess, Mr Pecksniff. My own opinions, that like that celebrated conundrum, 'Why's a man in jail like a man out of jail?' there's no answer to it. Upon my soul and body, it's the queerest sort of thing altogether - but there's no use in talking about it. Ha! Ha!'

With which consolatory deduction from the gloomy premises recited, Mr Tigg roused himself by a great effort, and proceeded in his former strain.

'Now I'll tell you what it is. I'm a most confoundedly soft-hearted kind of fellow in my way, and I cannot stand by, and see you two blades cutting each other's throats when there's nothing to be got by it. Mr Pecksniff, you're the cousin of the testator upstairs and we're the nephew - I say we, meaning Chiv. Perhaps in all essential points you are more nearly related to him than we are. Very good. If so, so be it. But you can't get at him, neither can we. I give you my brightest word of honour, sir, that I've been looking through that keyhole with short intervals of rest, ever since nine o'clock this morning, in expectation of receiving an answer to one of the most moderate and gentlemanly applications for a little temporary assistance - only fifteen pounds, and MY security - that the mind of man can conceive. In the meantime, sir, he is perpetually closeted with, and pouring his whole confidence into the bosom of, a stranger. Now I say decisively with

regard to this state of circumstances, that it won't do; that it won't act; that it can't be; and that it must not be suffered to continue.'

'Every man,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'has a right, an undoubted right, (which I, for one, would not call in question for any earthly consideration; oh no!) to regulate his own proceedings by his own likings and dislikings, supposing they are not immoral and not irreligious. I may feel in my own breast, that Mr Chuzzlewit does not regard - me, for instance; say me - with exactly that amount of Christian love which should subsist between us. I may feel grieved and hurt at the circumstance; still I may not rush to the conclusion that Mr Chuzzlewit is wholly without a justification in all his coldnesses. Heaven forbid! Besides; how, Mr Tigg,' continued Pecksniff even more gravely and impressively than he had spoken yet, 'how could Mr Chuzzlewit be prevented from having these peculiar and most extraordinary confidences of which you speak; the existence of which I must admit; and which I cannot but deplore - for his sake? Consider, my good sir - ' and here Mr Pecksniff eyed him wistfully - 'how very much at random you are talking.'

'Why, as to that,' rejoined Tigg, 'it certainly is a difficult question.'

'Undoubtedly it is a difficult question,' Mr Pecksniff answered. As he spoke he drew himself aloft, and seemed to grow more mindful, suddenly, of the moral gulf between himself and the creature he addressed. 'Undoubtedly it is a very difficult question. And I am far from feeling sure that it is a question any one is authorized to discuss. Good evening to you.'

'You don't know that the Spottletoes are here, I suppose?' said Mr Tigg.

'What do you mean, sir? what Spottletoes?' asked Pecksniff, stopping abruptly on his way to the door.

'Mr and Mrs Spottletoe,' said Chevy Slyme, Esquire, speaking aloud for the first time, and speaking very sulkily; shambling with his legs the while. 'Spottletoe married my father's brother's child, didn't he? And Mrs Spottletoe is Chuzzlewit's own niece, isn't she? She was his favourite once. You may well ask what Spottletoes.'

'Now upon my sacred word!' cried Mr Pecksniff, looking upwards. 'This is dreadful. The rapacity of these people is absolutely frightful!'

'It's not only the Spottletoes either, Tigg,' said Slyme, looking at that gentleman and speaking at Mr Pecksniff. 'Anthony Chuzzlewit and his son have got wind of it, and have come down this afternoon. I saw 'em not five minutes ago, when I was waiting round the corner.'

'Oh, Mammon, Mammon!' cried Mr Pecksniff, smiting his forehead.

'So there,' said Slyme, regardless of the interruption, 'are his brother and another nephew for you, already.'

'This is the whole thing, sir,' said Mr Tigg; 'this is the point and purpose at which I was gradually arriving when my friend Slyme here, with six words, hit it full. Mr Pecksniff, now that your cousin (and Chiv's uncle) has turned up, some steps must be taken to prevent his disappearing again; and, if possible, to counteract the influence which is exercised over him now, by this designing favourite. Everybody who is interested feels it, sir. The whole family is pouring down to this place. The time has come when individual jealousies and interests must be forgotten for a time, sir, and union must be made against the common enemy. When the common enemy is routed, you will all set up for yourselves again; every lady and gentleman who has a part in the game, will go in on their own account and bowl away, to the best of their ability, at the testator's wicket, and nobody will be in a worse position than before. Think of it. Don't commit yourself now. You'll find us at the Half Moon and Seven Stars in this village, at any time, and open to any reasonable proposition. Hem! Chiv, my dear fellow, go out and see what sort of a night it is.'

Mr Slyme lost no time in disappearing, and it is to be presumed in going round the corner. Mr Tigg, planting his legs as wide apart as he could be reasonably expected by the most sanguine man to keep them, shook his head at Mr Pecksniff and smiled.

'We must not be too hard,' he said, 'upon the little eccentricities of our friend Slyme. You saw him whisper me?'

Mr Pecksniff had seen him.

'You heard my answer, I think?'

Mr Pecksniff had heard it.

'Five shillings, eh?' said Mr Tigg, thoughtfully. 'Ah! what an extraordinary fellow! Very moderate too!'

Mr Pecksniff made no answer.

'Five shillings!' pursued Mr Tigg, musing; 'and to be punctually repaid next week; that's the best of it. You heard that?'

Mr Pecksniff had not heard that.

'No! You surprise me!' cried Tigg. 'That's the cream of the thing sir. I never knew that man fail to redeem a promise, in my life. You're not in want of change, are you?'

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'thank you. Not at all.'

'Just so,' returned Mr Tigg. 'If you had been, I'd have got it for you.' With that he began to whistle; but a dozen seconds had not elapsed when he stopped short, and looking earnestly at Mr Pecksniff, said:

'Perhaps you'd rather not lend Slyme five shillings?'

'I would much rather not,' Mr Pecksniff rejoined.

'Egad!' cried Tigg, gravely nodding his head as if some ground of objection occurred to him at that moment for the first time, 'it's very possible you may be right. Would you entertain the same sort of objection to lending me five shillings now?'

'Yes, I couldn't do it, indeed,' said Mr Pecksniff.

'Not even half-a-crown, perhaps?' urged Mr Tigg.

'Not even half-a-crown.'

'Why, then we come,' said Mr Tigg, 'to the ridiculously small amount of eighteen pence. Ha! ha!'

'And that,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'would be equally objectionable.'

On receipt of this assurance, Mr Tigg shook him heartily by both hands, protesting with much earnestness, that he was one of the most consistent and remarkable men he had ever met, and that he desired the honour of his better acquaintance. He moreover observed that there were many little characteristics about his friend Slyme, of which he could by no means, as a man of strict honour, approve; but that he was prepared to forgive him all these slight drawbacks, and much more, in consideration of the great pleasure he himself had that day enjoyed in his social intercourse with Mr Pecksniff, which had given him a far higher and more enduring delight than the successful negotiation of any small loan on the part of his friend could possibly have imparted. With which remarks he would beg leave, he said, to wish Mr Pecksniff a very good evening. And so he took himself off; as little abashed by his recent failure as any gentleman would desire to be.

The meditations of Mr Pecksniff that evening at the bar of the Dragon, and that night in his own house, were very serious and grave indeed;

the more especially as the intelligence he had received from Messrs Tigg and Slyme touching the arrival of other members of the family, were fully confirmed on more particular inquiry. For the Spottletoes had actually gone straight to the Dragon, where they were at that moment housed and mounting guard, and where their appearance had occasioned such a vast sensation that Mrs Lupin, scenting their errand before they had been under her roof half an hour, carried the news herself with all possible secrecy straight to Mr Pecksniff's house; indeed it was her great caution in doing so which occasioned her to miss that gentleman, who entered at the front door of the Dragon just as she emerged from the back one. Moreover, Mr Anthony Chuzzlewit and his son Jonas were economically quartered at the Half Moon and Seven Stars, which was an obscure ale-house; and by the very next coach there came posting to the scene of action, so many other affectionate members of the family (who quarrelled with each other, inside and out, all the way down, to the utter distraction of the coachman), that in less than four-and-twenty hours the scanty tavern accommodation was at a premium, and all the private lodgings in the place, amounting to full four beds and sofa, rose cent per cent in the market.

In a word, things came to that pass that nearly the whole family sat down before the Blue Dragon, and formally invested it; and Martin Chuzzlewit was in a state of siege. But he resisted bravely; refusing to receive all letters, messages, and parcels; obstinately declining to treat with anybody; and holding out no hope or promise of capitulation. Meantime the family forces were perpetually encountering each other in divers parts of the neighbourhood; and, as no one branch of the Chuzzlewit tree had ever been known to agree with another within the memory of man, there was such a skirmishing, and flouting, and snapping off of heads, in the metaphorical sense of that expression; such a bandying of words and calling of names; such an upturning of noses and wrinkling of brows; such a formal interment of good feelings and violent resurrection of ancient grievances; as had never been known in those quiet parts since the earliest record of their civilized existence.

At length, in utter despair and hopelessness, some few of the belligerents began to speak to each other in only moderate terms of mutual aggravation; and nearly all addressed themselves with a show of tolerable decency to Mr Pecksniff, in recognition of his high character and influential position. Thus, by little and little, they made common cause of Martin Chuzzlewit's obduracy, until it was agreed (if such a word can be used in connection with the Chuzzlewits) that there should be a general council and conference held at Mr Pecksniff's house upon a certain day at noon; which all members of the family who had brought themselves within reach of the summons, were forthwith bidden and invited, solemnly, to attend.

If ever Mr Pecksniff wore an apostolic look, he wore it on this memorable day. If ever his unruffled smile proclaimed the words, 'I am a messenger of peace!' that was its mission now. If ever man combined within himself all the mild qualities of the lamb with a considerable touch of the dove, and not a dash of the crocodile, or the least possible suggestion of the very mildest seasoning of the serpent, that man was he. And, oh, the two Miss Pecksniffs! Oh, the serene expression on the face of Charity, which seemed to say, 'I know that all my family have injured me beyond the possibility of reparation, but I forgive them, for it is my duty so to do!' And, oh, the gay simplicity of Mercy; so charming, innocent, and infant-like, that if she had gone out walking by herself, and it had been a little earlier in the season, the robin-redbreasts might have covered her with leaves against her will, believing her to be one of the sweet children in the wood, come out of it, and issuing forth once more to look for blackberries in the young freshness of her heart! What words can paint the Pecksniffs in that trying hour? Oh, none; for words have naughty company among them, and the Pecksniffs were all goodness.

But when the company arrived! That was the time. When Mr Pecksniff, rising from his seat at the table's head, with a daughter on either hand, received his guests in the best parlour and motioned them to chairs, with eyes so overflowing and countenance so damp with gracious perspiration, that he may be said to have been in a kind of moist meekness! And the company; the jealous stony-hearted distrustful company, who were all shut up in themselves, and had no faith in anybody, and wouldn't believe anything, and would no more allow themselves to be softened or lulled asleep by the Pecksniffs than if they had been so many hedgehogs or porcupines!

First, there was Mr Spottletoe, who was so bald and had such big whiskers, that he seemed to have stopped his hair, by the sudden application of some powerful remedy, in the very act of falling off his head, and to have fastened it irrevocably on his face. Then there was Mrs Spottletoe, who being much too slim for her years, and of a poetical constitution, was accustomed to inform her more intimate friends that the said whiskers were 'the lodestar of her existence;' and who could now, by reason of her strong affection for her uncle Chuzzlewit, and the shock it gave her to be suspected of testamentary designs upon him, do nothing but cry - except moan. Then there were Anthony Chuzzlewit, and his son Jonas; the face of the old man so sharpened by the wariness and cunning of his life, that it seemed to cut him a passage through the crowded room, as he edged away behind the remotest chairs; while the son had so well profited by the precept and example of the father, that he looked a year or two the elder of the twain, as they stood winking their red eyes, side by side, and whispering to each other softly. Then there was the widow of a deceased brother of Mr Martin Chuzzlewit, who being almost

supernaturally disagreeable, and having a dreary face and a bony figure and a masculine voice, was, in right of these qualities, what is commonly called a strong-minded woman; and who, if she could, would have established her claim to the title, and have shown herself, mentally speaking, a perfect Samson, by shutting up her brother-in-law in a private madhouse, until he proved his complete sanity by loving her very much. Beside her sat her spinster daughters, three in number, and of gentlemanly deportment, who had so mortified themselves with tight stays, that their tempers were reduced to something less than their waists, and sharp lacing was expressed in their very noses. Then there was a young gentleman, grandnephew of Mr Martin Chuzzlewit, very dark and very hairy, and apparently born for no particular purpose but to save looking-glasses the trouble of reflecting more than just the first idea and sketchy notion of a face, which had never been carried out. Then there was a solitary female cousin who was remarkable for nothing but being very deaf, and living by herself, and always having the toothache. Then there was George Chuzzlewit, a gay bachelor cousin, who claimed to be young but had been younger, and was inclined to corpulency, and rather overfed himself; to that extent, indeed, that his eyes were strained in their sockets, as if with constant surprise; and he had such an obvious disposition to pimples, that the bright spots on his cravat, the rich pattern on his waistcoat, and even his glittering trinkets, seemed to have broken out upon him, and not to have come into existence comfortably. Last of all there were present Mr Chevy Slyme and his friend Tigg. And it is worthy of remark, that although each person present disliked the other, mainly because he or she DID belong to the family, they one and all concurred in hating Mr Tigg because he didn't.

Such was the pleasant little family circle now assembled in Mr Pecksniff's best parlour, agreeably prepared to fall foul of Mr Pecksniff or anybody else who might venture to say anything whatever upon any subject.

'This,' said Mr Pecksniff, rising and looking round upon them with folded hands, 'does me good. It does my daughters good. We thank you for assembling here. We are grateful to you with our whole hearts. It is a blessed distinction that you have conferred upon us, and believe me' - it is impossible to conceive how he smiled here - 'we shall not easily forget it.'

'I am sorry to interrupt you, Pecksniff,' remarked Mr Spottletoe, with his whiskers in a very portentous state; 'but you are assuming too much to yourself, sir. Who do you imagine has it in contemplation to confer a distinction upon YOU, sir?'

A general murmur echoed this inquiry, and applauded it.

'If you are about to pursue the course with which you have begun, sir,' pursued Mr Spottletoe in a great heat, and giving a violent rap on the table with his knuckles, 'the sooner you desist, and this assembly separates, the better. I am no stranger, sir, to your preposterous desire to be regarded as the head of this family, but I can tell YOU, sir -'

Oh yes, indeed! HE tell. HE! What? He was the head, was he? From the strong-minded woman downwards everybody fell, that instant, upon Mr Spottletoe, who after vainly attempting to be heard in silence was fain to sit down again, folding his arms and shaking his head most wrathfully, and giving Mrs Spottletoe to understand in dumb show, that that scoundrel Pecksniff might go on for the present, but he would cut in presently, and annihilate him.

'I am not sorry,' said Mr Pecksniff in resumption of his address, 'I am really not sorry that this little incident has happened. It is good to feel that we are met here without disguise. It is good to know that we have no reserve before each other, but are appearing freely in our own characters.'

Here, the eldest daughter of the strong-minded woman rose a little way from her seat, and trembling violently from head to foot, more as it seemed with passion than timidity, expressed a general hope that some people WOULD appear in their own characters, if it were only for such a proceeding having the attraction of novelty to recommend it; and that when they (meaning the some people before mentioned) talked about their relations, they would be careful to observe who was present in company at the time; otherwise it might come round to those relations' ears, in a way they little expected; and as to red noses (she observed) she had yet to learn that a red nose was any disgrace, inasmuch as people neither made nor coloured their own noses, but had that feature provided for them without being first consulted; though even upon that branch of the subject she had great doubts whether certain noses were redder than other noses, or indeed half as red as some. This remark being received with a shrill titter by the two sisters of the speaker, Miss Charity Pecksniff begged with much politeness to be informed whether any of those very low observations were levelled at her; and receiving no more explanatory answer than was conveyed in the adage 'Those the cap fits, let them wear it,' immediately commenced a somewhat acrimonious and personal retort, wherein she was much comforted and abetted by her sister Mercy, who laughed at the same with great heartiness; indeed far more naturally than life. And it being quite impossible that any difference of opinion can take place among women without every woman who is within hearing taking active part in it, the strong-minded lady and her two daughters, and Mrs Spottletoe, and the deaf cousin (who was not at all disqualified from joining in the dispute by

reason of being perfectly unacquainted with its merits), one and all plunged into the quarrel directly.

The two Miss Pecksniffs being a pretty good match for the three Miss Chuzzlewits, and all five young ladies having, in the figurative language of the day, a great amount of steam to dispose of, the altercation would no doubt have been a long one but for the high valour and prowess of the strong-minded woman, who, in right of her reputation for powers of sarcasm, did so belabour and pummel Mrs Spottletoe with taunting words that the poor lady, before the engagement was two minutes old, had no refuge but in tears. These she shed so plentifully, and so much to the agitation and grief of Mr Spottletoe, that that gentleman, after holding his clenched fist close to Mr Pecksniff's eyes, as if it were some natural curiosity from the near inspection whereof he was likely to derive high gratification and improvement, and after offering (for no particular reason that anybody could discover) to kick Mr George Chuzzlewit for, and in consideration of, the trifling sum of sixpence, took his wife under his arm and indignantly withdrew. This diversion, by distracting the attention of the combatants, put an end to the strife, which, after breaking out afresh some twice or thrice in certain inconsiderable spurts and dashes, died away in silence.

It was then that Mr Pecksniff once more rose from his chair. It was then that the two Miss Pecksniffs composed themselves to look as if there were no such beings - not to say present, but in the whole compass of the world - as the three Miss Chuzzlewits; while the three Miss Chuzzlewits became equally unconscious of the existence of the two Miss Pecksniffs.

'It is to be lamented,' said Mr Pecksniff, with a forgiving recollection of Mr Spottletoe's fist, 'that our friend should have withdrawn himself so very hastily, though we have cause for mutual congratulation even in that, since we are assured that he is not distrustful of us in regard to anything we may say or do while he is absent. Now, that is very soothing, is it not?'

'Pecksniff,' said Anthony, who had been watching the whole party with peculiar keenness from the first - 'don't you be a hypocrite.'

'A what, my good sir?' demanded Mr Pecksniff.

'A hypocrite.'

'Charity, my dear,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'when I take my chamber candlestick to-night, remind me to be more than usually particular in praying for Mr Anthony Chuzzlewit; who has done me an injustice.'

This was said in a very bland voice, and aside, as being addressed to his daughter's private ear. With a cheerfulness of conscience, prompting almost a sprightly demeanour, he then resumed:

'All our thoughts centring in our very dear but unkind relative, and he being as it were beyond our reach, we are met to-day, really as if we were a funeral party, except - a blessed exception - that there is no body in the house.'

The strong-minded lady was not at all sure that this was a blessed exception. Quite the contrary.

'Well, my dear madam!' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Be that as it may, here we are; and being here, we are to consider whether it is possible by any justifiable means - '

'Why, you know as well as I,' said the strong-minded lady, 'that any means are justifiable in such a case, don't you?'

'Very good, my dear madam, very good; whether it is possible by ANY means, we will say by ANY means, to open the eyes of our valued relative to his present infatuation. Whether it is possible to make him acquainted by any means with the real character and purpose of that young female whose strange, whose very strange position, in reference to himself' - here Mr Pecksniff sunk his voice to an impressive whisper - 'really casts a shadow of disgrace and shame upon this family; and who, we know' - here he raised his voice again - 'else why is she his companion? harbours the very basest designs upon his weakness and his property.'

In their strong feeling on this point, they, who agreed in nothing else, all concurred as one mind. Good Heaven, that she should harbour designs upon his property! The strong-minded lady was for poison, her three daughters were for Bridewell and bread-and-water, the cousin with the toothache advocated Botany Bay, the two Miss Pecksniffs suggested flogging. Nobody but Mr Tigg, who, notwithstanding his extreme shabbiness, was still understood to be in some sort a lady's man, in right of his upper lip and his frogs, indicated a doubt of the justifiable nature of these measures; and he only ogled the three Miss Chuzzlewits with the least admixture of banter in his admiration, as though he would observe, 'You are positively down upon her to too great an extent, my sweet creatures, upon my soul you are!'

'Now,' said Mr Pecksniff, crossing his two forefingers in a manner which was at once conciliatory and argumentative; 'I will not, upon the one hand, go so far as to say that she deserves all the inflictions which have been so very forcibly and hilariously suggested;' one of his

ornamental sentences; 'nor will I, upon the other, on any account compromise my common understanding as a man, by making the assertion that she does not. What I would observe is, that I think some practical means might be devised of inducing our respected, shall I say our revered - ?'

'No!' interposed the strong-minded woman in a loud voice.

'Then I will not,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'You are quite right, my dear madam, and I appreciate and thank you for your discriminating objection - our respected relative, to dispose himself to listen to the promptings of nature, and not to the - '

'Go on, Pa!' cried Mercy.

'Why, the truth is, my dear,' said Mr Pecksniff, smiling upon his assembled kindred, 'that I am at a loss for a word. The name of those fabulous animals (pagan, I regret to say) who used to sing in the water, has quite escaped me.'

Mr George Chuzzlewit suggested 'swans.'

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Not swans. Very like swans, too. Thank you.'

The nephew with the outline of a countenance, speaking for the first and last time on that occasion, propounded 'Oysters.'

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff, with his own peculiar urbanity, 'nor oysters. But by no means unlike oysters; a very excellent idea; thank you, my dear sir, very much. Wait! Sirens. Dear me! sirens, of course. I think, I say, that means might be devised of disposing our respected relative to listen to the promptings of nature, and not to the siren-like delusions of art. Now we must not lose sight of the fact that our esteemed friend has a grandson, to whom he was, until lately, very much attached, and whom I could have wished to see here to-day, for I have a real and deep regard for him. A fine young man, a very fine young man! I would submit to you, whether we might not remove Mr Chuzzlewit's distrust of us, and vindicate our own disinterestedness by - '

'If Mr George Chuzzlewit has anything to say to ME,' interposed the strong-minded woman, sternly, 'I beg him to speak out like a man; and not to look at me and my daughters as if he could eat us.'

'As to looking, I have heard it said, Mrs Ned,' returned Mr George, angrily, 'that a cat is free to contemplate a monarch; and therefore I hope I have some right, having been born a member of this family, to look at a person who only came into it by marriage. As to eating, I beg

to say, whatever bitterness your jealousies and disappointed expectations may suggest to you, that I am not a cannibal, ma'am.'

'I don't know that!' cried the strong-minded woman.

'At all events, if I was a cannibal,' said Mr George Chuzzlewit, greatly stimulated by this retort, 'I think it would occur to me that a lady who had outlived three husbands, and suffered so very little from their loss, must be most uncommonly tough.'

The strong-minded woman immediately rose.

'And I will further add,' said Mr George, nodding his head violently at every second syllable; 'naming no names, and therefore hurting nobody but those whose consciences tell them they are alluded to, that I think it would be much more decent and becoming, if those who hooked and crooked themselves into this family by getting on the blind side of some of its members before marriage, and manslaughtering them afterwards by crowing over them to that strong pitch that they were glad to die, would refrain from acting the part of vultures in regard to other members of this family who are living. I think it would be full as well, if not better, if those individuals would keep at home, contenting themselves with what they have got (luckily for them) already; instead of hovering about, and thrusting their fingers into, a family pie, which they flavour much more than enough, I can tell them, when they are fifty miles away.'

'I might have been prepared for this!' cried the strong-minded woman, looking about her with a disdainful smile as she moved towards the door, followed by her three daughters. 'Indeed I was fully prepared for it from the first. What else could I expect in such an atmosphere as this!'

'Don't direct your halfpay-officers' gaze at me, ma'am, if you please,' interposed Miss Charity; 'for I won't bear it.'

This was a smart stab at a pension enjoyed by the strong-minded woman, during her second widowhood and before her last coverture. It told immensely.

'I passed from the memory of a grateful country, you very miserable minx,' said Mrs Ned, 'when I entered this family; and I feel now, though I did not feel then, that it served me right, and that I lost my claim upon the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland when I so degraded myself. Now, my dears, if you're quite ready, and have sufficiently improved yourselves by taking to heart the genteel example of these two young ladies, I think we'll go. Mr Pecksniff, we are very much obliged to you, really. We came to be entertained, and

you have far surpassed our utmost expectations, in the amusement you have provided for us. Thank you. Good-bye!

With such departing words, did this strong-minded female paralyse the Pecksniffian energies; and so she swept out of the room, and out of the house, attended by her daughters, who, as with one accord, elevated their three noses in the air, and joined in a contemptuous titter. As they passed the parlour window on the outside, they were seen to counterfeit a perfect transport of delight among themselves; and with this final blow and great discouragement for those within, they vanished.

Before Mr Pecksniff or any of his remaining visitors could offer a remark, another figure passed this window, coming, at a great rate in the opposite direction; and immediately afterwards, Mr Spottletoe burst into the chamber. Compared with his present state of heat, he had gone out a man of snow or ice. His head distilled such oil upon his whiskers, that they were rich and clogged with unctuous drops; his face was violently inflamed, his limbs trembled; and he gasped and strove for breath.

'My good sir!' cried Mr Pecksniff.

'Oh yes!' returned the other; 'oh yes, certainly! Oh to be sure! Oh, of course! You hear him? You hear him? all of you!'

'What's the matter?' cried several voices.

'Oh nothing!' cried Spottletoe, still gasping. 'Nothing at all! It's of no consequence! Ask him! HE'll tell you!'

'I do not understand our friend,' said Mr Pecksniff, looking about him in utter amazement. 'I assure you that he is quite unintelligible to me.'

'Unintelligible, sir!' cried the other. 'Unintelligible! Do you mean to say, sir, that you don't know what has happened! That you haven't decoyed us here, and laid a plot and a plan against us! Will you venture to say that you didn't know Mr Chuzzlewit was going, sir, and that you don't know he's gone, sir?'

'Gone!' was the general cry. 'Gone,' echoed Mr Spottletoe. 'Gone while we were sitting here. Gone. Nobody knows where he's gone. Oh, of course not! Nobody knew he was going. Oh, of course not! The landlady thought up to the very last moment that they were merely going for a ride; she had no other suspicion. Oh, of course not! She's not this fellow's creature. Oh, of course not!'

Adding to these exclamations a kind of ironical howl, and gazing upon the company for one brief instant afterwards, in a sudden silence, the irritated gentleman started off again at the same tremendous pace, and was seen no more.

It was in vain for Mr Pecksniff to assure them that this new and opportune evasion of the family was at least as great a shock and surprise to him as to anybody else. Of all the bullyings and denunciations that were ever heaped on one unlucky head, none can ever have exceeded in energy and heartiness those with which he was complimented by each of his remaining relatives, singly, upon bidding him farewell.

The moral position taken by Mr Tigg was something quite tremendous; and the deaf cousin, who had the complicated aggravation of seeing all the proceedings and hearing nothing but the catastrophe, actually scraped her shoes upon the scraper, and afterwards distributed impressions of them all over the top step, in token that she shook the dust from her feet before quitting that dissembling and perfidious mansion.

Mr Pecksniff had, in short, but one comfort, and that was the knowledge that all these his relations and friends had hated him to the very utmost extent before; and that he, for his part, had not distributed among them any more love than, with his ample capital in that respect, he could comfortably afford to part with. This view of his affairs yielded him great consolation; and the fact deserves to be noted, as showing with what ease a good man may be consoled under circumstances of failure and disappointment.