

Chapter VIII

Accompanies Mr Pecksniff And His Charming Daughters To The City Of London; And Relates What Fell Out Upon Their Way Thither

When Mr Pecksniff and the two young ladies got into the heavy coach at the end of the lane, they found it empty, which was a great comfort; particularly as the outside was quite full and the passengers looked very frosty. For as Mr Pecksniff justly observed - when he and his daughters had burrowed their feet deep in the straw, wrapped themselves to the chin, and pulled up both windows - it is always satisfactory to feel, in keen weather, that many other people are not as warm as you are. And this, he said, was quite natural, and a very beautiful arrangement; not confined to coaches, but extending itself into many social ramifications. 'For' (he observed), 'if every one were warm and well-fed, we should lose the satisfaction of admiring the fortitude with which certain conditions of men bear cold and hunger. And if we were no better off than anybody else, what would become of our sense of gratitude; which,' said Mr Pecksniff with tears in his eyes, as he shook his fist at a beggar who wanted to get up behind, 'is one of the holiest feelings of our common nature.'

His children heard with becoming reverence these moral precepts from the lips of their father, and signified their acquiescence in the same, by smiles. That he might the better feed and cherish that sacred flame of gratitude in his breast, Mr Pecksniff remarked that he would trouble his eldest daughter, even in this early stage of their journey, for the brandy-bottle. And from the narrow neck of that stone vessel he imbibed a copious refreshment.

'What are we?' said Mr Pecksniff, 'but coaches? Some of us are slow coaches' -

'Goodness, Pa!' cried Charity.

'Some of us, I say,' resumed her parent with increased emphasis, 'are slow coaches; some of us are fast coaches. Our passions are the horses; and rampant animals too - !'

'Really, Pa,' cried both the daughters at once. 'How very unpleasant.'

'And rampant animals too' repeated Mr Pecksniff with so much determination, that he may be said to have exhibited, at the moment a sort of moral rampancy himself; - and Virtue is the drag. We start from The Mother's Arms, and we run to The Dust Shovel.'

When he had said this, Mr Pecksniff, being exhausted, took some further refreshment. When he had done that, he corked the bottle tight, with the air of a man who had effectually corked the subject also; and went to sleep for three stages.

The tendency of mankind when it falls asleep in coaches, is to wake up cross; to find its legs in its way; and its corns an aggravation. Mr Pecksniff not being exempt from the common lot of humanity found himself, at the end of his nap, so decidedly the victim of these infirmities, that he had an irresistible inclination to visit them upon his daughters; which he had already begun to do in the shape of divers random kicks, and other unexpected motions of his shoes, when the coach stopped, and after a short delay the door was opened.

'Now mind,' said a thin sharp voice in the dark. 'I and my son go inside, because the roof is full, but you agree only to charge us outside prices. It's quite understood that we won't pay more. Is it?'

'All right, sir,' replied the guard.

'Is there anybody inside now?' inquired the voice.

'Three passengers,' returned the guard.

'Then I ask the three passengers to witness this bargain, if they will be so good,' said the voice. 'My boy, I think we may safely get in.'

In pursuance of which opinion, two people took their seats in the vehicle, which was solemnly licensed by Act of Parliament to carry any six persons who could be got in at the door.

'That was lucky!' whispered the old man, when they moved on again. 'And a great stroke of policy in you to observe it. He, he, he! We couldn't have gone outside. I should have died of the rheumatism!'

Whether it occurred to the dutiful son that he had in some degree over-reached himself by contributing to the prolongation of his father's days; or whether the cold had effected his temper; is doubtful. But he gave his father such a nudge in reply, that that good old gentleman was taken with a cough which lasted for full five minutes without intermission, and goaded Mr Pecksniff to that pitch of irritation, that he said at last - and very suddenly:

'There is no room! There is really no room in this coach for any gentleman with a cold in his head!'

'Mine,' said the old man, after a moment's pause, 'is upon my chest, Pecksniff.'

The voice and manner, together, now that he spoke out; the composure of the speaker; the presence of his son; and his knowledge of Mr Pecksniff; afforded a clue to his identity which it was impossible to mistake.

'Hem! I thought,' said Mr Pecksniff, returning to his usual mildness, 'that I addressed a stranger. I find that I address a relative, Mr Anthony Chuzzlewit and his son Mr Jonas - for they, my dear children, are our travelling companions - will excuse me for an apparently harsh remark. It is not MY desire to wound the feelings of any person with whom I am connected in family bonds. I may be a Hypocrite,' said Mr Pecksniff, cuttingly; 'but I am not a Brute.'

'Pooh, pooh!' said the old man. 'What signifies that word, Pecksniff? Hypocrite! why, we are all hypocrites. We were all hypocrites t'other day. I am sure I felt that to be agreed upon among us, or I shouldn't have called you one. We should not have been there at all, if we had not been hypocrites. The only difference between you and the rest was - shall I tell you the difference between you and the rest now, Pecksniff?'

'If you please, my good sir; if you please.'

'Why, the annoying quality in YOU, is,' said the old man, 'that you never have a confederate or partner in YOUR juggling; you would deceive everybody, even those who practise the same art; and have a way with you, as if you - he, he, he! - as if you really believed yourself. I'd lay a handsome wager now,' said the old man, 'if I laid wagers, which I don't and never did, that you keep up appearances by a tacit understanding, even before your own daughters here. Now I, when I have a business scheme in hand, tell Jonas what it is, and we discuss it openly. You're not offended, Pecksniff?'

'Offended, my good sir!' cried that gentleman, as if he had received the highest compliments that language could convey.

'Are you travelling to London, Mr Pecksniff?' asked the son.

'Yes, Mr Jonas, we are travelling to London. We shall have the pleasure of your company all the way, I trust?'

'Oh! ecod, you had better ask father that,' said Jonas. 'I am not a-going to commit myself.'

Mr Pecksniff was, as a matter of course, greatly entertained by this retort. His mirth having subsided, Mr Jonas gave him to understand that himself and parent were in fact travelling to their home in the metropolis; and that, since the memorable day of the great family

gathering, they had been tarrying in that part of the country, watching the sale of certain eligible investments, which they had had in their copartnership eye when they came down; for it was their custom, Mr Jonas said, whenever such a thing was practicable, to kill two birds with one stone, and never to throw away sprats, but as bait for whales. When he had communicated to Mr Pecksniff these pithy scraps of intelligence, he said, 'That if it was all the same to him, he would turn him over to father, and have a chat with the gals;' and in furtherance of this polite scheme, he vacated his seat adjoining that gentleman, and established himself in the opposite corner, next to the fair Miss Mercy.

The education of Mr Jonas had been conducted from his cradle on the strictest principles of the main chance. The very first word he learnt to spell was 'gain,' and the second (when he got into two syllables), 'money.' But for two results, which were not clearly foreseen perhaps by his watchful parent in the beginning, his training may be said to have been unexceptionable. One of these flaws was, that having been long taught by his father to over-reach everybody, he had imperceptibly acquired a love of over-reaching that venerable monitor himself. The other, that from his early habits of considering everything as a question of property, he had gradually come to look, with impatience, on his parent as a certain amount of personal estate, which had no right whatever to be going at large, but ought to be secured in that particular description of iron safe which is commonly called a coffin, and banked in the grave.

'Well, cousin!' said Mr Jonas - 'Because we ARE cousins, you know, a few times removed - so you're going to London?'

Miss Mercy replied in the affirmative, pinching her sister's arm at the same time, and giggling excessively.

'Lots of beaux in London, cousin!' said Mr Jonas, slightly advancing his elbow.

'Indeed, sir!' cried the young lady. 'They won't hurt us, sir, I dare say.' And having given him this answer with great demureness she was so overcome by her own humour, that she was fain to stifle her merriment in her sister's shawl.

'Merry,' cried that more prudent damsel, 'really I am ashamed of you. How can you go on so? You wild thing!' At which Miss Merry only laughed the more, of course.

'I saw a wildness in her eye, t'other day,' said Mr Jonas, addressing Charity. 'But you're the one to sit solemn! I say - You were regularly prim, cousin!'

'Oh! The old-fashioned fright!' cried Merry, in a whisper. 'Cherry my dear, upon my word you must sit next him. I shall die outright if he talks to me any more; I shall, positively!' To prevent which fatal consequence, the buoyant creature skipped out of her seat as she spoke, and squeezed her sister into the place from which she had risen.

'Don't mind crowding me,' cried Mr Jonas. 'I like to be crowded by gals. Come a little closer, cousin.'

'No, thank you, sir,' said Charity.

'There's that other one a-laughing again,' said Mr Jonas; 'she's a-laughing at my father, I shouldn't wonder. If he puts on that old flannel nightcap of his, I don't know what she'll do! Is that my father a-snoring, Pecksniff?'

'Yes, Mr Jonas.'

'Tread upon his foot, will you be so good?' said the young gentleman. 'The foot next you's the gouty one.'

Mr Pecksniff hesitating to perform this friendly office, Mr Jonas did it himself; at the same time crying:

'Come, wake up, father, or you'll be having the nightmare, and screeching out, I know. - Do you ever have the nightmare, cousin?' he asked his neighbour, with characteristic gallantry, as he dropped his voice again.

'Sometimes,' answered Charity. 'Not often.'

'The other one,' said Mr Jonas, after a pause. 'Does SHE ever have the nightmare?'

'I don't know,' replied Charity. 'You had better ask her.'

'She laughs so,' said Jonas; 'there's no talking to her. Only hark how she's a-going on now! You're the sensible one, cousin!'

'Tut, tut!' cried Charity.

'Oh! But you are! You know you are!'

'Mercy is a little giddy,' said Miss Charity. 'But she'll sober down in time.'

'It'll be a very long time, then, if she does at all,' rejoined her cousin. 'Take a little more room.'

'I am afraid of crowding you,' said Charity. But she took it notwithstanding; and after one or two remarks on the extreme heaviness of the coach, and the number of places it stopped at, they fell into a silence which remained unbroken by any member of the party until supper-time.

Although Mr Jonas conducted Charity to the hotel and sat himself beside her at the board, it was pretty clear that he had an eye to 'the other one' also, for he often glanced across at Mercy, and seemed to draw comparisons between the personal appearance of the two, which were not unfavourable to the superior plumpness of the younger sister. He allowed himself no great leisure for this kind of observation, however, being busily engaged with the supper, which, as he whispered in his fair companion's ear, was a contract business, and therefore the more she ate, the better the bargain was. His father and Mr Pecksniff, probably acting on the same wise principle, demolished everything that came within their reach, and by that means acquired a greasy expression of countenance, indicating contentment, if not repletion, which it was very pleasant to contemplate.

When they could eat no more, Mr Pecksniff and Mr Jonas subscribed for two sixpenny-worths of hot brandy-and-water, which the latter gentleman considered a more politic order than one shillingsworth; there being a chance of their getting more spirit out of the innkeeper under this arrangement than if it were all in one glass. Having swallowed his share of the enlivening fluid, Mr Pecksniff, under pretence of going to see if the coach were ready, went secretly to the bar, and had his own little bottle filled, in order that he might refresh himself at leisure in the dark coach without being observed.

These arrangements concluded, and the coach being ready, they got into their old places and jogged on again. But before he composed himself for a nap, Mr Pecksniff delivered a kind of grace after meat, in these words:

'The process of digestion, as I have been informed by anatomical friends, is one of the most wonderful works of nature. I do not know how it may be with others, but it is a great satisfaction to me to know, when regaling on my humble fare, that I am putting in motion the most beautiful machinery with which we have any acquaintance. I really feel at such times as if I was doing a public service. When I have wound myself up, if I may employ such a term,' said Mr Pecksniff with exquisite tenderness, 'and know that I am Going, I feel that in the lesson afforded by the works within me, I am a Benefactor to my Kind!'

As nothing could be added to this, nothing was said; and Mr Pecksniff, exulting, it may be presumed, in his moral utility, went to sleep again.

The rest of the night wore away in the usual manner. Mr Pecksniff and Old Anthony kept tumbling against each other and waking up much terrified, or crushed their heads in opposite corners of the coach and strangely tattooed the surface of their faces - Heaven knows how - in their sleep. The coach stopped and went on, and went on and stopped, times out of number. Passengers got up and passengers got down, and fresh horses came and went and came again, with scarcely any interval between each team as it seemed to those who were dozing, and with a gap of a whole night between every one as it seemed to those who were broad awake. At length they began to jolt and rumble over horribly uneven stones, and Mr Pecksniff looking out of window said it was to-morrow morning, and they were there.

Very soon afterwards the coach stopped at the office in the city; and the street in which it was situated was already in a bustle, that fully bore out Mr Pecksniff's words about its being morning, though for any signs of day yet appearing in the sky it might have been midnight. There was a dense fog too; as if it were a city in the clouds, which they had been travelling to all night up a magic beanstalk; and there was a thick crust upon the pavement like oilcake; which, one of the outsides (mad, no doubt) said to another (his keeper, of course), was Snow.

Taking a confused leave of Anthony and his son, and leaving the luggage of himself and daughters at the office to be called for afterwards, Mr Pecksniff, with one of the young ladies under each arm, dived across the street, and then across other streets, and so up the queerest courts, and down the strangest alleys and under the blindest archways, in a kind of frenzy; now skipping over a kennel, now running for his life from a coach and horses; now thinking he had lost his way, now thinking he had found it; now in a state of the highest confidence, now despondent to the last degree, but always in a great perspiration and flurry; until at length they stopped in a kind of paved yard near the Monument. That is to say, Mr Pecksniff told them so; for as to anything they could see of the Monument, or anything else but the buildings close at hand, they might as well have been playing blindman's buff at Salisbury.

Mr Pecksniff looked about him for a moment, and then knocked at the door of a very dingy edifice, even among the choice collection of dingy edifices at hand; on the front of which was a little oval board like a tea-tray, with this inscription - 'Commercial Boarding-House: M. Todgers.'

It seemed that M. Todgers was not up yet, for Mr Pecksniff knocked twice and rang thrice, without making any impression on anything but a dog over the way. At last a chain and some bolts were withdrawn with a rusty noise, as if the weather had made the very fastenings hoarse, and a small boy with a large red head, and no nose to speak of, and a very dirty Wellington boot on his left arm, appeared; who (being surprised) rubbed the nose just mentioned with the back of a shoe-brush, and said nothing.

'Still a-bed my man?' asked Mr Pecksniff.

'Still a-bed!' replied the boy. 'I wish they was still a-bed. They're very noisy a-bed; all calling for their boots at once. I thought you was the Paper, and wondered why you didn't shove yourself through the grating as usual. What do you want?'

Considering his years, which were tender, the youth may be said to have preferred this question sternly, and in something of a defiant manner. But Mr Pecksniff, without taking umbrage at his bearing put a card in his hand, and bade him take that upstairs, and show them in the meanwhile into a room where there was a fire.

'Or if there's one in the eating parlour,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'I can find it myself.' So he led his daughters, without waiting for any further introduction, into a room on the ground-floor, where a table-cloth (rather a tight and scanty fit in reference to the table it covered) was already spread for breakfast; displaying a mighty dish of pink boiled beef; an instance of that particular style of loaf which is known to housekeepers as a slack-baked, crummy quartern; a liberal provision of cups and saucers; and the usual appendages.

Inside the fender were some half-dozen pairs of shoes and boots, of various sizes, just cleaned and turned with the soles upwards to dry; and a pair of short black gaiters, on one of which was chalked - in sport, it would appear, by some gentleman who had slipped down for the purpose, pending his toilet, and gone up again - 'Jinkins's Particular,' while the other exhibited a sketch in profile, claiming to be the portrait of Jinkins himself.

M. Todgers's Commercial Boarding-House was a house of that sort which is likely to be dark at any time; but that morning it was especially dark. There was an odd smell in the passage, as if the concentrated essence of all the dinners that had been cooked in the kitchen since the house was built, lingered at the top of the kitchen stairs to that hour, and like the Black Friar in Don Juan, 'wouldn't be driven away.' In particular, there was a sensation of cabbage; as if all the greens that had ever been boiled there, were evergreens, and flourished in immortal strength. The parlour was wainscoted, and

communicated to strangers a magnetic and instinctive consciousness of rats and mice. The staircase was very gloomy and very broad, with balustrades so thick and heavy that they would have served for a bridge. In a sombre corner on the first landing, stood a gruff old giant of a clock, with a preposterous coronet of three brass balls on his head; whom few had ever seen - none ever looked in the face - and who seemed to continue his heavy tick for no other reason than to warn heedless people from running into him accidentally. It had not been papered or painted, hadn't Todgers's, within the memory of man. It was very black, begrimed, and mouldy. And, at the top of the staircase, was an old, disjointed, rickety, ill-favoured skylight, patched and mended in all kinds of ways, which looked distrustfully down at everything that passed below, and covered Todgers's up as if it were a sort of human cucumber-frame, and only people of a peculiar growth were reared there.

Mr Pecksniff and his fair daughters had not stood warming themselves at the fire ten minutes, when the sound of feet was heard upon the stairs, and the presiding deity of the establishment came hurrying in.

M. Todgers was a lady, rather a bony and hard-featured lady, with a row of curls in front of her head, shaped like little barrels of beer; and on the top of it something made of net - you couldn't call it a cap exactly - which looked like a black cobweb. She had a little basket on her arm, and in it a bunch of keys that jingled as she came. In her other hand she bore a flaming tallow candle, which, after surveying Mr Pecksniff for one instant by its light, she put down upon the table, to the end that she might receive him with the greater cordiality.

'Mr Pecksniff!' cried Mrs Todgers. 'Welcome to London! Who would have thought of such a visit as this, after so - dear, dear! - so many years! How do you DO, Mr Pecksniff?'

'As well as ever; and as glad to see you, as ever;' Mr Pecksniff made response. 'Why, you are younger than you used to be!'

'YOU are, I am sure!' said Mrs Todgers. 'You're not a bit changed.'

'What do you say to this?' cried Mr Pecksniff, stretching out his hand towards the young ladies. 'Does this make me no older?'

'Not your daughters!' exclaimed the lady, raising her hands and clasping them. 'Oh, no, Mr Pecksniff! Your second, and her bridesmaid!'

Mr Pecksniff smiled complacently; shook his head; and said, 'My daughters, Mrs Todgers. Merely my daughters.'

'Ah!' sighed the good lady, 'I must believe you, for now I look at 'em I think I should have known 'em anywhere. My dear Miss Pecksniffs, how happy your Pa has made me!'

She hugged them both; and being by this time overpowered by her feelings or the inclemency of the morning, jerked a little pocket handkerchief out of the little basket, and applied the same to her face.

'Now, my good madam,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'I know the rules of your establishment, and that you only receive gentlemen boarders. But it occurred to me, when I left home, that perhaps you would give my daughters house room, and make an exception in their favour.'

'Perhaps?' cried Mrs Todgers ecstatically. 'Perhaps?'

'I may say then, that I was sure you would,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'I know that you have a little room of your own, and that they can be comfortable there, without appearing at the general table.'

'Dear girls!' said Mrs Todgers. 'I must take that liberty once more.' Mrs Todgers meant by this that she must embrace them once more, which she accordingly did with great ardour. But the truth was that the house being full with the exception of one bed, which would now be occupied by Mr Pecksniff, she wanted time for consideration; and so much time too (for it was a knotty point how to dispose of them), that even when this second embrace was over, she stood for some moments gazing at the sisters, with affection beaming in one eye, and calculation shining out of the other.

'I think I know how to arrange it,' said Mrs Todgers, at length. 'A sofa bedstead in the little third room which opens from my own parlour. - Oh, you dear girls!'

Thereupon she embraced them once more, observing that she could not decide which was most like their poor mother (which was highly probable, seeing that she had never beheld that lady), but that she rather thought the youngest was; and then she said that as the gentlemen would be down directly, and the ladies were fatigued with travelling, would they step into her room at once?

It was on the same floor; being, in fact, the back parlour; and had, as Mrs Todgers said, the great advantage (in London) of not being overlooked; as they would see when the fog cleared off. Nor was this a vainglorious boast, for it commanded at a perspective of two feet, a brown wall with a black cistern on the top. The sleeping apartment designed for the young ladies was approached from this chamber by a mightily convenient little door, which would only open when fallen against by a strong person. It commanded from a similar point of sight

another angle of the wall, and another side of the cistern. 'Not the damp side,' said Mrs Todgers. 'THAT is Mr Jinkins's.'

In the first of these sanctuaries a fire was speedily kindled by the youthful porter, who, whistling at his work in the absence of Mrs Todgers (not to mention his sketching figures on his corduroys with burnt firewood), and being afterwards taken by that lady in the fact, was dismissed with a box on his ears. Having prepared breakfast for the young ladies with her own hands, she withdrew to preside in the other room; where the joke at Mr Jinkins's expense seemed to be proceeding rather noisily.

'I won't ask you yet, my dears,' said Mr Pecksniff, looking in at the door, 'how you like London. Shall I?'

'We haven't seen much of it, Pa!' cried Merry.

'Nothing, I hope,' said Cherry. (Both very miserably.)

'Indeed,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'that's true. We have our pleasure, and our business too, before us. All in good time. All in good time!'

Whether Mr Pecksniff's business in London was as strictly professional as he had given his new pupil to understand, we shall see, to adopt that worthy man's phraseology, 'all in good time.'