

Chapter XI

Wherein A Certain Gentleman Becomes Particular In His Attentions To A Certain Lady; And More Coming Events Than One, Cast Their Shadows Before

The family were within two or three days of their departure from Mrs Todgers's, and the commercial gentlemen were to a man despondent and not to be comforted, because of the approaching separation, when Bailey junior, at the jocund time of noon, presented himself before Miss Charity Pecksniff, then sitting with her sister in the banquet chamber, hemming six new pocket-handkerchiefs for Mr Jenkins; and having expressed a hope, preliminary and pious, that he might be blest, gave her in his pleasant way to understand that a visitor attended to pay his respects to her, and was at that moment waiting in the drawing-room. Perhaps this last announcement showed in a more striking point of view than many lengthened speeches could have done, the trustfulness and faith of Bailey's nature; since he had, in fact, last seen the visitor on the door-mat, where, after signifying to him that he would do well to go upstairs, he had left him to the guidance of his own sagacity. Hence it was at least an even chance that the visitor was then wandering on the roof of the house, or vainly seeking to extricate himself from the maze of bedrooms; Todgers's being precisely that kind of establishment in which an unpiloted stranger is pretty sure to find himself in some place where he least expects and least desires to be.

'A gentleman for me!' cried Charity, pausing in her work; 'my gracious, Bailey!'

'Ah!' said Bailey. 'It IS my gracious, an't it? Wouldn't I be gracious neither, not if I wos him!'

The remark was rendered somewhat obscure in itself, by reason (as the reader may have observed) of a redundancy of negatives; but accompanied by action expressive of a faithful couple walking arm-in-arm towards a parochial church, mutually exchanging looks of love, it clearly signified this youth's conviction that the caller's purpose was of an amorous tendency. Miss Charity affected to reprove so great a liberty; but she could not help smiling. He was a strange boy, to be sure. There was always some ground of probability and likelihood mingled with his absurd behaviour. That was the best of it!

'But I don't know any gentlemen, Bailey,' said Miss Pecksniff. 'I think you must have made a mistake.'

Mr Bailey smiled at the extreme wildness of such a supposition, and regarded the young ladies with unimpaired affability.

'My dear Merry,' said Charity, 'who CAN it be? Isn't it odd? I have a great mind not to go to him really. So very strange, you know!'

The younger sister plainly considered that this appeal had its origin in the pride of being called upon and asked for; and that it was intended as an assertion of superiority, and a retaliation upon her for having captured the commercial gentlemen. Therefore, she replied, with great affection and politeness, that it was, no doubt, very strange indeed; and that she was totally at a loss to conceive what the ridiculous person unknown could mean by it.

'Quite impossible to divine!' said Charity, with some sharpness, 'though still, at the same time, you needn't be angry, my dear.'

'Thank you,' retorted Merry, singing at her needle. 'I am quite aware of that, my love.'

'I am afraid your head is turned, you silly thing,' said Cherry.

'Do you know, my dear,' said Merry, with engaging candour, 'that I have been afraid of that, myself, all along! So much incense and nonsense, and all the rest of it, is enough to turn a stronger head than mine. What a relief it must be to you, my dear, to be so very comfortable in that respect, and not to be worried by those odious men! How do you do it, Cherry?'

This artless inquiry might have led to turbulent results, but for the strong emotions of delight evinced by Bailey junior, whose relish in the turn the conversation had lately taken was so acute, that it impelled and forced him to the instantaneous performance of a dancing step, extremely difficult in its nature, and only to be achieved in a moment of ecstasy, which is commonly called The Frog's Hornpipe. A manifestation so lively, brought to their immediate recollection the great virtuous precept, 'Keep up appearances whatever you do,' in which they had been educated. They forbore at once, and jointly signified to Mr Bailey that if he should presume to practice that figure any more in their presence, they would instantly acquaint Mrs Todgers with the fact, and would demand his condign punishment, at the hands of that lady. The young gentleman having expressed the bitterness of his contrition by affecting to wipe away scalding tears with his apron, and afterwards feigning to wring a vast amount of water from that garment, held the door open while Miss Charity passed out; and so that damsel went in state upstairs to receive her mysterious adorer.

By some strange occurrence of favourable circumstances he had found out the drawing-room, and was sitting there alone.

'Ah, cousin!' he said. 'Here I am, you see. You thought I was lost, I'll be bound. Well! how do you find yourself by this time?'

Miss Charity replied that she was quite well, and gave Mr Jonas Chuzzlewit her hand.

'That's right,' said Mr Jonas, 'and you've got over the fatigues of the journey have you? I say. How's the other one?'

'My sister is very well, I believe,' returned the young lady. 'I have not heard her complain of any indisposition, sir. Perhaps you would like to see her, and ask her yourself?'

'No, no cousin!' said Mr Jonas, sitting down beside her on the window-seat. 'Don't be in a hurry. There's no occasion for that, you know. What a cruel girl you are!'

'It's impossible for YOU to know,' said Cherry, 'whether I am or not.'

'Well, perhaps it is,' said Mr Jonas. 'I say - Did you think I was lost? You haven't told me that.'

'I didn't think at all about it,' answered Cherry.

'Didn't you though?' said Jonas, pondering upon this strange reply. 'Did the other one?'

'I am sure it's impossible for me to say what my sister may, or may not have thought on such a subject,' cried Cherry. 'She never said anything to me about it, one way or other.'

'Didn't she laugh about it?' inquired Jonas.

'No. She didn't even laugh about it,' answered Charity.

'She's a terrible one to laugh, an't she?' said Jonas, lowering his voice.

'She is very lively,' said Cherry.

'Liveliness is a pleasant thing - when it don't lead to spending money. An't it?' asked Mr Jonas.

'Very much so, indeed,' said Cherry, with a demureness of manner that gave a very disinterested character to her assent.

'Such liveliness as yours I mean, you know,' observed Mr Jonas, as he nudged her with his elbow. 'I should have come to see you before, but

I didn't know where you was. How quick you hurried off, that morning!

'I was amenable to my papa's directions,' said Miss Charity.

'I wish he had given me his direction,' returned her cousin, 'and then I should have found you out before. Why, I shouldn't have found you even now, if I hadn't met him in the street this morning. What a sleek, sly chap he is! Just like a tomcat, an't he?'

'I must trouble you to have the goodness to speak more respectfully of my papa, Mr Jonas,' said Charity. 'I can't allow such a tone as that, even in jest.'

'Ecod, you may say what you like of MY father, then, and so I give you leave,' said Jonas. 'I think it's liquid aggravation that circulates through his veins, and not regular blood. How old should you think my father was, cousin?'

'Old, no doubt,' replied Miss Charity; 'but a fine old gentleman.'

'A fine old gentleman!' repeated Jonas, giving the crown of his hat an angry knock. 'Ah! It's time he was thinking of being drawn out a little finer too. Why, he's eighty!'

'Is he, indeed?' said the young lady.

'And ecod,' cried Jonas, 'now he's gone so far without giving in, I don't see much to prevent his being ninety; no, nor even a hundred. Why, a man with any feeling ought to be ashamed of being eighty, let alone more. Where's his religion, I should like to know, when he goes flying in the face of the Bible like that? Threescore-and-ten's the mark, and no man with a conscience, and a proper sense of what's expected of him, has any business to live longer.'

Is any one surprised at Mr Jonas making such a reference to such a book for such a purpose? Does any one doubt the old saw, that the Devil (being a layman) quotes Scripture for his own ends? If he will take the trouble to look about him, he may find a greater number of confirmations of the fact in the occurrences of any single day, than the steam-gun can discharge balls in a minute.

'But there's enough of my father,' said Jonas; 'it's of no use to go putting one's self out of the way by talking about HIM. I called to ask you to come and take a walk, cousin, and see some of the sights; and to come to our house afterwards, and have a bit of something. Pecksniff will most likely look in in the evening, he says, and bring you home. See, here's his writing; I made him put it down this

morning when he told me he shouldn't be back before I came here; in case you wouldn't believe me. There's nothing like proof, is there? Ha, ha! I say - you'll bring the other one, you know!

Miss Charity cast her eyes upon her father's autograph, which merely said - 'Go, my children, with your cousin. Let there be union among us when it is possible;' and after enough of hesitation to impart a proper value to her consent, withdrew to prepare her sister and herself for the excursion. She soon returned, accompanied by Miss Mercy, who was by no means pleased to leave the brilliant triumphs of Todgers's for the society of Mr Jonas and his respected father.

'Aha!' cried Jonas. 'There you are, are you?'

'Yes, fright,' said Mercy, 'here I am; and I would much rather be anywhere else, I assure you.'

'You don't mean that,' cried Mr Jonas. 'You can't, you know. It isn't possible.'

'You can have what opinion you like, fright,' retorted Mercy. 'I am content to keep mine; and mine is that you are a very unpleasant, odious, disagreeable person.' Here she laughed heartily, and seemed to enjoy herself very much.

'Oh, you're a sharp gal!' said Mr Jonas. 'She's a regular teaser, an't she, cousin?'

Miss Charity replied in effect, that she was unable to say what the habits and propensities of a regular teaser might be; and that even if she possessed such information, it would ill become her to admit the existence of any creature with such an unceremonious name in her family; far less in the person of a beloved sister; 'whatever,' added Cherry with an angry glance, 'whatever her real nature may be.'

'Well, my dear,' said Merry, 'the only observation I have to make is, that if we don't go out at once, I shall certainly take my bonnet off again, and stay at home.'

This threat had the desired effect of preventing any farther altercation, for Mr Jonas immediately proposed an adjournment, and the same being carried unanimously, they departed from the house straightway. On the doorstep, Mr Jonas gave an arm to each cousin; which act of gallantry being observed by Bailey junior, from the garret window, was by him saluted with a loud and violent fit of coughing, to which paroxysm he was still the victim when they turned the corner.

Mr Jonas inquired in the first instance if they were good walkers and being answered, 'Yes,' submitted their pedestrian powers to a pretty severe test; for he showed them as many sights, in the way of bridges, churches, streets, outsides of theatres, and other free spectacles, in that one forenoon, as most people see in a twelvemonth. It was observable in this gentleman, that he had an insurmountable distaste to the insides of buildings, and that he was perfectly acquainted with the merits of all shows, in respect of which there was any charge for admission, which it seemed were every one detestable, and of the very lowest grade of merit. He was so thoroughly possessed with this opinion, that when Miss Charity happened to mention the circumstance of their having been twice or thrice to the theatre with Mr Jinkins and party, he inquired, as a matter of course, 'where the orders came from?' and being told that Mr Jinkins and party paid, was beyond description entertained, observing that 'they must be nice flats, certainly;' and often in the course of the walk, bursting out again into a perfect convulsion of laughter at the surpassing silliness of those gentlemen, and (doubtless) at his own superior wisdom.

When they had been out for some hours and were thoroughly fatigued, it being by that time twilight, Mr Jonas intimated that he would show them one of the best pieces of fun with which he was acquainted. This joke was of a practical kind, and its humour lay in taking a hackney-coach to the extreme limits of possibility for a shilling. Happily it brought them to the place where Mr Jonas dwelt, or the young ladies might have rather missed the point and cream of the jest.

The old-established firm of Anthony Chuzzlewit and Son, Manchester Warehousemen, and so forth, had its place of business in a very narrow street somewhere behind the Post Office; where every house was in the brightest summer morning very gloomy; and where light porters watered the pavement, each before his own employer's premises, in fantastic patterns, in the dog-days; and where spruce gentlemen with their hands in the pockets of symmetrical trousers, were always to be seen in warm weather, contemplating their undeniable boots in dusty warehouse doorways; which appeared to be the hardest work they did, except now and then carrying pens behind their ears. A dim, dirty, smoky, tumble-down, rotten old house it was, as anybody would desire to see; but there the firm of Anthony Chuzzlewit and Son transacted all their business and their pleasure too, such as it was; for neither the young man nor the old had any other residence, or any care or thought beyond its narrow limits.

Business, as may be readily supposed, was the main thing in this establishment; insomuch indeed that it shouldered comfort out of doors, and jostled the domestic arrangements at every turn. Thus in the miserable bedrooms there were files of moth-eaten letters hanging

up against the walls; and linen rollers, and fragments of old patterns, and odds and ends of spoiled goods, strewed upon the ground; while the meagre bedsteads, washing-stands, and scraps of carpet, were huddled away into corners as objects of secondary consideration, not to be thought of but as disagreeable necessities, furnishing no profit, and intruding on the one affair of life. The single sitting-room was on the same principle, a chaos of boxes and old papers, and had more counting-house stools in it than chairs; not to mention a great monster of a desk straddling over the middle of the floor, and an iron safe sunk into the wall above the fireplace. The solitary little table for purposes of refectation and social enjoyment, bore as fair a proportion to the desk and other business furniture, as the graces and harmless relaxations of life had ever done, in the persons of the old man and his son, to their pursuit of wealth. It was meanly laid out now for dinner; and in a chair before the fire sat Anthony himself, who rose to greet his son and his fair cousins as they entered.

An ancient proverb warns us that we should not expect to find old heads upon young shoulders; to which it may be added that we seldom meet with that unnatural combination, but we feel a strong desire to knock them off; merely from an inherent love we have of seeing things in their right places. It is not improbable that many men, in no wise choleric by nature, felt this impulse rising up within them, when they first made the acquaintance of Mr Jonas; but if they had known him more intimately in his own house, and had sat with him at his own board, it would assuredly have been paramount to all other considerations.

'Well, ghost!' said Mr Jonas, dutifully addressing his parent by that title. 'Is dinner nearly ready?'

'I should think it was,' rejoined the old man.

'What's the good of that?' rejoined the son. 'I should think it was. I want to know.'

'Ah! I don't know for certain,' said Anthony.

'You don't know for certain,' rejoined his son in a lower tone. 'No. You don't know anything for certain, YOU don't. Give me your candle here. I want it for the gals.'

Anthony handed him a battered old office candlestick, with which Mr Jonas preceded the young ladies to the nearest bedroom, where he left them to take off their shawls and bonnets; and returning, occupied himself in opening a bottle of wine, sharpening the carving-knife, and muttering compliments to his father, until they and the dinner appeared together. The repast consisted of a hot leg of mutton with

greens and potatoes; and the dishes having been set upon the table by a slipshod old woman, they were left to enjoy it after their own manner.

'Bachelor's Hall, you know, cousin,' said Mr Jonas to Charity. 'I say - the other one will be having a laugh at this when she gets home, won't she? Here; you sit on the right side of me, and I'll have her upon the left. Other one, will you come here?'

'You're such a fright,' replied Mercy, 'that I know I shall have no appetite if I sit so near you; but I suppose I must.'

'An't she lively?' whispered Mr Jonas to the elder sister, with his favourite elbow emphasis.

'Oh I really don't know!' replied Miss Pecksniff, tartly. 'I am tired of being asked such ridiculous questions.'

'What's that precious old father of mine about now?' said Mr Jonas, seeing that his parent was travelling up and down the room instead of taking his seat at table. 'What are you looking for?'

'I've lost my glasses, Jonas,' said old Anthony.

'Sit down without your glasses, can't you?' returned his son. 'You don't eat or drink out of 'em, I think; and where's that sleepy-headed old Chuffey got to! Now, stupid. Oh! you know your name, do you?'

It would seem that he didn't, for he didn't come until the father called. As he spoke, the door of a small glass office, which was partitioned off from the rest of the room, was slowly opened, and a little blear-eyed, weazen-faced, ancient man came creeping out. He was of a remote fashion, and dusty, like the rest of the furniture; he was dressed in a decayed suit of black; with breeches garnished at the knees with rusty wisps of ribbon, the very paupers of shoestrings; on the lower portion of his spindle legs were dingy worsted stockings of the same colour. He looked as if he had been put away and forgotten half a century before, and somebody had just found him in a lumber-closet.

Such as he was, he came slowly creeping on towards the table, until at last he crept into the vacant chair, from which, as his dim faculties became conscious of the presence of strangers, and those strangers ladies, he rose again, apparently intending to make a bow. But he sat down once more without having made it, and breathing on his shrivelled hands to warm them, remained with his poor blue nose immovable above his plate, looking at nothing, with eyes that saw nothing, and a face that meant nothing. Take him in that state, and he was an embodiment of nothing. Nothing else.

'Our clerk,' said Mr Jonas, as host and master of the ceremonies: 'Old Chuffey.'

'Is he deaf?' inquired one of the young ladies.

'No, I don't know that he is. He an't deaf, is he, father?'

'I never heard him say he was,' replied the old man.

'Blind?' inquired the young ladies.

'N - no. I never understood that he was at all blind,' said Jonas, carelessly. 'You don't consider him so, do you, father?'

'Certainly not,' replied Anthony.

'What is he, then?'

'Why, I'll tell you what he is,' said Mr Jonas, apart to the young ladies, 'he's precious old, for one thing; and I an't best pleased with him for that, for I think my father must have caught it of him. He's a strange old chap, for another,' he added in a louder voice, 'and don't understand any one hardly, but HIM!' He pointed to his honoured parent with the carving-fork, in order that they might know whom he meant.

'How very strange!' cried the sisters.

'Why, you see,' said Mr Jonas, 'he's been addling his old brains with figures and book-keeping all his life; and twenty years ago or so he went and took a fever. All the time he was out of his head (which was three weeks) he never left off casting up; and he got to so many million at last that I don't believe he's ever been quite right since. We don't do much business now though, and he an't a bad clerk.'

'A very good one,' said Anthony.

'Well! He an't a dear one at all events,' observed Jonas; 'and he earns his salt, which is enough for our look-out. I was telling you that he hardly understands any one except my father; he always understands him, though, and wakes up quite wonderful. He's been used to his ways so long, you see! Why, I've seen him play whist, with my father for a partner; and a good rubber too; when he had no more notion what sort of people he was playing against, than you have.'

'Has he no appetite?' asked Merry.

'Oh, yes,' said Jonas, plying his own knife and fork very fast. 'He eats - when he's helped. But he don't care whether he waits a minute or an hour, as long as father's here; so when I'm at all sharp set, as I am to-day, I come to him after I've taken the edge off my own hunger, you know. Now, Chuffey, stupid, are you ready?'

Chuffey remained immovable.

'Always a perverse old file, he was,' said Mr Jonas, coolly helping himself to another slice. 'Ask him, father.'

'Are you ready for your dinner, Chuffey?' asked the old man

'Yes, yes,' said Chuffey, lighting up into a sentient human creature at the first sound of the voice, so that it was at once a curious and quite a moving sight to see him. 'Yes, yes. Quite ready, Mr Chuzzlewit. Quite ready, sir. All ready, all ready, all ready.' With that he stopped, smilingly, and listened for some further address; but being spoken to no more, the light forsook his face by little and little, until he was nothing again.

'He'll be very disagreeable, mind,' said Jonas, addressing his cousins as he handed the old man's portion to his father. 'He always chokes himself when it an't broth. Look at him, now! Did you ever see a horse with such a wall-eyed expression as he's got? If it hadn't been for the joke of it I wouldn't have let him come in to-day; but I thought he'd amuse you.' The poor old subject of this humane speech was, happily for himself, as unconscious of its purport as of most other remarks that were made in his presence. But the mutton being tough, and his gums weak, he quickly verified the statement relative to his choking propensities, and underwent so much in his attempts to dine, that Mr Jonas was infinitely amused; protesting that he had seldom seen him better company in all his life, and that he was enough to make a man split his sides with laughing. Indeed, he went so far as to assure the sisters, that in this point of view he considered Chuffey superior to his own father; which, as he significantly added, was saying a great deal.

It was strange enough that Anthony Chuzzlewit, himself so old a man, should take a pleasure in these gibings of his estimable son at the expense of the poor shadow at their table. But he did, unquestionably; though not so much - to do him justice - with reference to their ancient clerk, as in exultation at the sharpness of Jonas. For the same reason that young man's coarse allusions, even to himself, filled him with a stealthy glee; causing him to rub his hands and chuckle covertly, as if he said in his sleeve, 'I taught him. I trained him. This is the heir of my bringing-up. Sly, cunning, and covetous, he'll not squander my money. I worked for this; I hoped for this; it has been the great end and aim of my life.'

What a noble end and aim it was to contemplate in the attainment truly! But there be some who manufacture idols after the fashion of themselves, and fail to worship them when they are made; charging their deformity on outraged nature. Anthony was better than these at any rate.

Chuffey boggled over his plate so long, that Mr Jones, losing patience, took it from him at last with his own hands, and requested his father to signify to that venerable person that he had better 'peg away at his bread;' which Anthony did.

'Aye, aye!' cried the old man, brightening up as before, when this was communicated to him in the same voice, 'quite right, quite right. He's your own son, Mr Chuzzlewit! Bless him for a sharp lad! Bless him, bless him!'

Mr Jonas considered this so particularly childish (perhaps with some reason), that he only laughed the more, and told his cousins that he was afraid one of these fine days, Chuffey would be the death of him. The cloth was then removed, and the bottle of wine set upon the table, from which Mr Jonas filled the young ladies' glasses, calling on them not to spare it, as they might be certain there was plenty more where that came from. But he added with some haste after this sally that it was only his joke, and they wouldn't suppose him to be in earnest, he was sure.

'I shall drink,' said Anthony, 'to Pecksniff. Your father, my dears. A clever man, Pecksniff. A wary man! A hypocrite, though, eh? A hypocrite, girls, eh? Ha, ha, ha! Well, so he is. Now, among friends, he is. I don't think the worse of him for that, unless it is that he overdoes it. You may overdo anything, my darlings. You may overdo even hypocrisy. Ask Jonas!'

'You can't overdo taking care of yourself,' observed that hopeful gentleman with his mouth full.

'Do you hear that, my dears?' cried Anthony, quite enraptured. 'Wisdom, wisdom! A good exception, Jonas. No. It's not easy to overdo that.'

'Except,' whispered Mr Jonas to his favourite cousin, 'except when one lives too long. Ha, ha! Tell the other one that - I say!'

'Good gracious me!' said Cherry, in a petulant manner. 'You can tell her yourself, if you wish, can't you?'

'She seems to make such game of one,' replied Mr Jonas.

'Then why need you trouble yourself about her?' said Charity. 'I am sure she doesn't trouble herself much about you.'

'Don't she though?' asked Jonas.

'Good gracious me, need I tell you that she don't?' returned the young lady.

Mr Jonas made no verbal rejoinder, but he glanced at Mercy with an odd expression in his face; and said THAT wouldn't break his heart, she might depend upon it. Then he looked on Charity with even greater favour than before, and besought her, as his polite manner was, to 'come a little closer.'

'There's another thing that's not easily overdone, father,' remarked Jonas, after a short silence.

'What's that?' asked the father; grinning already in anticipation.

'A bargain,' said the son. 'Here's the rule for bargains - 'Do other men, for they would do you.' That's the true business precept. All others are counterfeits.'

The delighted father applauded this sentiment to the echo; and was so much tickled by it, that he was at the pains of imparting the same to his ancient clerk, who rubbed his hands, nodded his palsied head, winked his watery eyes, and cried in his whistling tones, 'Good! good! Your own son, Mr Chuzzlewit' with every feeble demonstration of delight that he was capable of making. But this old man's enthusiasm had the redeeming quality of being felt in sympathy with the only creature to whom he was linked by ties of long association, and by his present helplessness. And if there had been anybody there, who cared to think about it, some dregs of a better nature unawakened, might perhaps have been descried through that very medium, melancholy though it was, yet lingering at the bottom of the worn-out cask called Chuffey.

As matters stood, nobody thought or said anything upon the subject; so Chuffey fell back into a dark corner on one side of the fireplace, where he always spent his evenings, and was neither seen nor heard again that night; save once, when a cup of tea was given him, in which he was seen to soak his bread mechanically. There was no reason to suppose that he went to sleep at these seasons, or that he heard, or saw, or felt, or thought. He remained, as it were, frozen up - if any term expressive of such a vigorous process can be applied to him - until he was again thawed for the moment by a word or touch from Anthony.

Miss Charity made tea by desire of Mr Jonas, and felt and looked so like the lady of the house that she was in the prettiest confusion imaginable; the more so from Mr Jonas sitting close beside her, and whispering a variety of admiring expressions in her ear. Miss Mercy, for her part, felt the entertainment of the evening to be so distinctly and exclusively theirs, that she silently deplored the commercial gentlemen - at that moment, no doubt, wearying for her return - and yawned over yesterday's newspaper. As to Anthony, he went to sleep outright, so Jonas and Cherry had a clear stage to themselves as long as they chose to keep possession of it.

When the tea-tray was taken away, as it was at last, Mr Jonas produced a dirty pack of cards, and entertained the sisters with divers small feats of dexterity: whereof the main purpose of every one was, that you were to decoy somebody into laying a wager with you that you couldn't do it; and were then immediately to win and pocket his money. Mr Jonas informed them that these accomplishments were in high vogue in the most intellectual circles, and that large amounts were constantly changing hands on such hazards. And it may be remarked that he fully believed this; for there is a simplicity of cunning no less than a simplicity of innocence; and in all matters where a lively faith in knavery and meanness was required as the ground-work of belief, Mr Jonas was one of the most credulous of men. His ignorance, which was stupendous, may be taken into account, if the reader pleases, separately.

This fine young man had all the inclination to be a profligate of the first water, and only lacked the one good trait in the common catalogue of debauched vices - open-handedness - to be a notable vagabond. But there his griping and penurious habits stepped in; and as one poison will sometimes neutralise another, when wholesome remedies would not avail, so he was restrained by a bad passion from quaffing his full measure of evil, when virtue might have sought to hold him back in vain.

By the time he had unfolded all the peddling schemes he knew upon the cards, it was growing late in the evening; and Mr Pecksniff not making his appearance, the young ladies expressed a wish to return home. But this, Mr Jonas, in his gallantry, would by no means allow, until they had partaken of some bread and cheese and porter; and even then he was excessively unwilling to allow them to depart; often beseeching Miss Charity to come a little closer, or to stop a little longer, and preferring many other complimentary petitions of that nature in his own hospitable and earnest way. When all his efforts to detain them were fruitless, he put on his hat and greatcoat preparatory to escorting them to Todgers's; remarking that he knew they would rather walk thither than ride; and that for his part he was quite of their opinion.

'Good night,' said Anthony. 'Good night; remember me to - ha, ha, ha! - to Pecksniff. Take care of your cousin, my dears; beware of Jonas; he's a dangerous fellow. Don't quarrel for him, in any case!'

'Oh, the creature!' cried Mercy. 'The idea of quarrelling for HIM! You may take him, Cherry, my love, all to yourself. I make you a present of my share.'

'What! I'm a sour grape, am I, cousin?' said Jonas.

Miss Charity was more entertained by this repartee than one would have supposed likely, considering its advanced age and simple character. But in her sisterly affection she took Mr Jonas to task for leaning so very hard upon a broken reed, and said that he must not be so cruel to poor Merry any more, or she (Charity) would positively be obliged to hate him. Mercy, who really had her share of good humour, only retorted with a laugh; and they walked home in consequence without any angry passages of words upon the way. Mr Jonas being in the middle, and having a cousin on each arm, sometimes squeezed the wrong one; so tightly too, as to cause her not a little inconvenience; but as he talked to Charity in whispers the whole time, and paid her great attention, no doubt this was an accidental circumstance. When they arrived at Todgers's, and the door was opened, Mercy broke hastily from them, and ran upstairs; but Charity and Jonas lingered on the steps talking together for more than five minutes; so, as Mrs Todgers observed next morning, to a third party, 'It was pretty clear what was going on THERE, and she was glad of it, for it really was high time that Miss Pecksniff thought of settling.'

And now the day was coming on, when that bright vision which had burst on Todgers's so suddenly, and made a sunshine in the shady breast of Jinkins, was to be seen no more; when it was to be packed, like a brown paper parcel, or a fish-basket, or an oyster barrel or a fat gentleman, or any other dull reality of life, in a stagecoach and carried down into the country.

'Never, my dear Miss Pecksniffs,' said Mrs Todgers, when they retired to rest on the last night of their stay, 'never have I seen an establishment so perfectly broken-hearted as mine is at this present moment of time. I don't believe the gentlemen will be the gentlemen they were, or anything like it - no, not for weeks to come. You have a great deal to answer for, both of you.'

They modestly disclaimed any wilful agency in this disastrous state of things, and regretted it very much.

'Your pious pa, too,' said Mrs Todgers. 'There's a loss! My dear Miss Pecksniffs, your pa is a perfect missionary of peace and love.'

Entertaining an uncertainty as to the particular kind of love supposed to be comprised in Mr Pecksniff's mission, the young ladies received the compliment rather coldly.

'If I dared,' said Mrs Todgers, perceiving this, 'to violate a confidence which has been reposed in me, and to tell you why I must beg of you to leave the little door between your room and mine open tonight, I think you would be interested. But I mustn't do it, for I promised Mr Jenkins faithfully, that I would be as silent as the tomb.'

'Dear Mrs Todgers! What can you mean?'

'Why, then, my sweet Miss Pecksniffs,' said the lady of the house; 'my own loves, if you will allow me the privilege of taking that freedom on the eve of our separation, Mr Jenkins and the gentlemen have made up a little musical party among themselves, and DO intend, in the dead of this night, to perform a serenade upon the stairs outside the door. I could have wished, I own,' said Mrs Todgers, with her usual foresight, 'that it had been fixed to take place an hour or two earlier; because when gentlemen sit up late they drink, and when they drink they're not so musical, perhaps, as when they don't. But this is the arrangement; and I know you will be gratified, my dear Miss Pecksniffs, by such a mark of their attention.'

The young ladies were at first so much excited by the news, that they vowed they couldn't think of going to bed until the serenade was over. But half an hour of cool waiting so altered their opinion that they not only went to bed, but fell asleep; and were, moreover, not ecstatically charmed to be awakened some time afterwards by certain dulcet strains breaking in upon the silent watches of the night.

It was very affecting - very. Nothing more dismal could have been desired by the most fastidious taste. The gentleman of a vocal turn was head mute, or chief mourner; Jenkins took the bass; and the rest took anything they could get. The youngest gentleman blew his melancholy into a flute. He didn't blow much out of it, but that was all the better. If the two Miss Pecksniffs and Mrs Todgers had perished by spontaneous combustion, and the serenade had been in honour of their ashes, it would have been impossible to surpass the unutterable despair expressed in that one chorus, 'Go where glory waits thee!' It was a requiem, a dirge, a moan, a howl, a wail, a lament, an abstract of everything that is sorrowful and hideous in sound. The flute of the youngest gentleman was wild and fitful. It came and went in gusts, like the wind. For a long time together he seemed to have left off, and when it was quite settled by Mrs Todgers and the young ladies that,

overcome by his feelings, he had retired in tears, he unexpectedly turned up again at the very top of the tune, gasping for breath. He was a tremendous performer. There was no knowing where to have him; and exactly when you thought he was doing nothing at all, then was he doing the very thing that ought to astonish you most.

There were several of these concerted pieces; perhaps two or three too many, though that, as Mrs Todgers said, was a fault on the right side. But even then, even at that solemn moment, when the thrilling sounds may be presumed to have penetrated into the very depths of his nature, if he had any depths, Jinkins couldn't leave the youngest gentleman alone. He asked him distinctly, before the second song began - as a personal favour too, mark the villain in that - not to play. Yes; he said so; not to play. The breathing of the youngest gentleman was heard through the key-hole of the door. He DIDN'T play. What vent was a flute for the passions swelling up within his breast? A trombone would have been a world too mild.

The serenade approached its close. Its crowning interest was at hand. The gentleman of a literary turn had written a song on the departure of the ladies, and adapted it to an old tune. They all joined, except the youngest gentleman in company, who, for the reasons aforesaid, maintained a fearful silence. The song (which was of a classical nature) invoked the oracle of Apollo, and demanded to know what would become of Todgers's when CHARITY and MERCY were banished from its walls. The oracle delivered no opinion particularly worth remembering, according to the not infrequent practice of oracles from the earliest ages down to the present time. In the absence of enlightenment on that subject, the strain deserted it, and went on to show that the Miss Pecksniffs were nearly related to Rule Britannia, and that if Great Britain hadn't been an island, there could have been no Miss Pecksniffs. And being now on a nautical tack, it closed with this verse:

'All hail to the vessel of Pecksniff the sire! And favouring breezes to fan;
While Tritons flock round it, and proudly admire
The architect, artist, and man!'

As they presented this beautiful picture to the imagination, the gentlemen gradually withdrew to bed to give the music the effect of distance; and so it died away, and Todgers's was left to its repose.

Mr Bailey reserved his vocal offering until the morning, when he put his head into the room as the young ladies were kneeling before their trunks, packing up, and treated them to an imitation of the voice of a young dog in trying circumstances; when that animal is supposed by persons of a lively fancy, to relieve his feelings by calling for pen and ink.

'Well, young ladies,' said the youth, 'so you're a-going home, are you, worse luck?'

'Yes, Bailey, we're going home,' returned Mercy.

'An't you a-going to leave none of 'em a lock of your hair?' inquired the youth. 'It's real, an't it?'

They laughed at this, and told him of course it was.

'Oh, is it of course, though?' said Bailey. 'I know better than that. Hers an't. Why, I see it hanging up once, on that nail by the winder. Besides, I have gone behind her at dinner-time and pulled it; and she never know'd. I say, young ladies, I'm a-going to leave. I an't a-going to stand being called names by her, no longer.'

Miss Mercy inquired what his plans for the future might be; in reply to whom Mr Bailey intimated that he thought of going either into top-boots, or into the army.

'Into the army!' cried the young ladies, with a laugh.

'Ah!' said Bailey, 'why not? There's a many drummers in the Tower. I'm acquainted with 'em. Don't their country set a valley on 'em, mind you! Not at all!'

'You'll be shot, I see,' observed Mercy.

'Well!' cried Mr Bailey, 'wot if I am? There's something gamey in it, young ladies, an't there? I'd sooner be hit with a cannon-ball than a rolling-pin, and she's always a-catching up something of that sort, and throwing it at me, when the gentlemen's appetites is good. Wot,' said Mr Bailey, stung by the recollection of his wrongs, 'wot, if they DO consume the per-vishuns. It an't MY fault, is it?'

'Surely no one says it is,' said Mercy.

'Don't they though?' retorted the youth. 'No. Yes. Ah! oh! No one mayn't say it is! but some one knows it is. But I an't a-going to have every rise in prices wisited on me. I an't a-going to be killed because the markets is dear. I won't stop. And therefore,' added Mr Bailey, relenting into a smile, 'wotever you mean to give me, you'd better give me all at once, becous if ever you come back agin, I shan't be here; and as to the other boy, HE won't deserve nothing, I know.'

The young ladies, on behalf of Mr Pecksniff and themselves, acted on this thoughtful advice; and in consideration of their private friendship, presented Mr Bailey with a gratuity so liberal that he could hardly do

enough to show his gratitude; which found but an imperfect vent, during the remainder of the day, in divers secret slaps upon his pocket, and other such facetious pantomime. Nor was it confined to these ebullitions; for besides crushing a bandbox, with a bonnet in it, he seriously damaged Mr Pecksniff's luggage, by ardently hauling it down from the top of the house; and in short evinced, by every means in his power, a lively sense of the favours he had received from that gentleman and his family.

Mr Pecksniff and Mr Jenkins came home to dinner arm-in-arm; for the latter gentleman had made half-holiday on purpose; thus gaining an immense advantage over the youngest gentleman and the rest, whose time, as it perversely chanced, was all bespoke, until the evening. The bottle of wine was Mr Pecksniff's treat, and they were very sociable indeed; though full of lamentations on the necessity of parting. While they were in the midst of their enjoyment, old Anthony and his son were announced; much to the surprise of Mr Pecksniff, and greatly to the discomfiture of Jenkins.

'Come to say good-bye, you see,' said Anthony, in a low voice, to Mr Pecksniff, as they took their seats apart at the table, while the rest conversed among themselves. 'Where's the use of a division between you and me? We are the two halves of a pair of scissors, when apart, Pecksniff; but together we are something. Eh?'

'Unanimity, my good sir,' rejoined Mr Pecksniff, 'is always delightful.'

'I don't know about that,' said the old man, 'for there are some people I would rather differ from than agree with. But you know my opinion of you.'

Mr Pecksniff, still having 'hypocrite' in his mind, only replied by a motion of his head, which was something between an affirmative bow, and a negative shake.

'Complimentary,' said Anthony. 'Complimentary, upon my word. It was an involuntary tribute to your abilities, even at the time; and it was not a time to suggest compliments either. But we agreed in the coach, you know, that we quite understood each other.'

'Oh, quite!' assented Mr Pecksniff, in a manner which implied that he himself was misunderstood most cruelly, but would not complain.

Anthony glanced at his son as he sat beside Miss Charity, and then at Mr Pecksniff, and then at his son again, very many times. It happened that Mr Pecksniff's glances took a similar direction; but when he became aware of it, he first cast down his eyes, and then closed them; as if he were determined that the old man should read nothing there.

'Jonas is a shrewd lad,' said the old man.

'He appears,' rejoined Mr Pecksniff in his most candid manner, 'to be very shrewd.'

'And careful,' said the old man.

'And careful, I have no doubt,' returned Mr Pecksniff.

'Look ye!' said Anthony in his ear. 'I think he is sweet upon you daughter.'

'Tut, my good sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, with his eyes still closed; 'young people - young people - a kind of cousins, too - no more sweetness than is in that, sir.'

'Why, there is very little sweetness in that, according to our experience,' returned Anthony. 'Isn't there a trifle more here?'

'Impossible to say,' rejoined Mr Pecksniff. 'Quite impossible! You surprise me.'

'Yes, I know that,' said the old man, drily. 'It may last; I mean the sweetness, not the surprise; and it may die off. Supposing it should last, perhaps (you having feathered your nest pretty well, and I having done the same), we might have a mutual interest in the matter.'

Mr Pecksniff, smiling gently, was about to speak, but Anthony stopped him.

'I know what you are going to say. It's quite unnecessary. You have never thought of this for a moment; and in a point so nearly affecting the happiness of your dear child, you couldn't, as a tender father, express an opinion; and so forth. Yes, quite right. And like you! But it seems to me, my dear Pecksniff,' added Anthony, laying his hand upon his sleeve, 'that if you and I kept up the joke of pretending not to see this, one of us might possibly be placed in a position of disadvantage; and as I am very unwilling to be that party myself, you will excuse my taking the liberty of putting the matter beyond a doubt thus early; and having it distinctly understood, as it is now, that we do see it, and do know it. Thank you for your attention. We are now upon an equal footing; which is agreeable to us both, I am sure.'

He rose as he spoke; and giving Mr Pecksniff a nod of intelligence, moved away from him to where the young people were sitting; leaving that good man somewhat puzzled and discomfited by such very plain dealing, and not quite free from a sense of having been foiled in the exercise of his familiar weapons.

But the night-coach had a punctual character, and it was time to join it at the office; which was so near at hand that they had already sent their luggage and arranged to walk. Thither the whole party repaired, therefore, after no more delay than sufficed for the equipment of the Miss Pecksniffs and Mrs Todgers. They found the coach already at its starting-place, and the horses in; there, too, were a large majority of the commercial gentlemen, including the youngest, who was visibly agitated, and in a state of deep mental dejection.

Nothing could equal the distress of Mrs Todgers in parting from the young ladies, except the strong emotions with which she bade adieu to Mr Pecksniff. Never surely was a pocket-handkerchief taken in and out of a flat reticule so often as Mrs Todgers's was, as she stood upon the pavement by the coach-door supported on either side by a commercial gentleman; and by the sight of the coach-lamps caught such brief snatches and glimpses of the good man's face, as the constant interposition of Mr Jinkins allowed. For Jinkins, to the last the youngest gentleman's rock a-head in life, stood upon the coachstep talking to the ladies. Upon the other step was Mr Jonas, who maintained that position in right of his cousinship; whereas the youngest gentleman, who had been first upon the ground, was deep in the booking-office among the black and red placards, and the portraits of fast coaches, where he was ignominiously harassed by porters, and had to contend and strive perpetually with heavy baggage. This false position, combined with his nervous excitement, brought about the very consummation and catastrophe of his miseries; for when in the moment of parting he aimed a flower, a hothouse flower that had cost money, at the fair hand of Mercy, it reached, instead, the coachman on the box, who thanked him kindly, and stuck it in his buttonhole.

They were off now; and Todgers's was alone again. The two young ladies, leaning back in their separate corners, resigned themselves to their own regretful thoughts. But Mr Pecksniff, dismissing all ephemeral considerations of social pleasure and enjoyment, concentrated his meditations on the one great virtuous purpose before him, of casting out that ingrate and deceiver, whose presence yet troubled his domestic hearth, and was a sacrilege upon the altars of his household gods.