

Chapter XXX

Proves That Changes May Be Rung In The Best-Regulated Families, And That Mr Pecksniff Was A Special Hand At A Triple-Bob-Major

As the surgeon's first care after amputating a limb, is to take up the arteries the cruel knife has severed, so it is the duty of this history, which in its remorseless course has cut from the Pecksniffian trunk its right arm, Mercy, to look to the parent stem, and see how in all its various ramifications it got on without her.

And first of Mr Pecksniff it may be observed, that having provided for his youngest daughter that choicest of blessings, a tender and indulgent husband; and having gratified the dearest wish of his parental heart by establishing her in life so happily; he renewed his youth, and spreading the plumage of his own bright conscience, felt himself equal to all kinds of flights. It is customary with fathers in stage-plays, after giving their daughters to the men of their hearts, to congratulate themselves on having no other business on their hands but to die immediately; though it is rarely found that they are in a hurry to do it. Mr Pecksniff, being a father of a more sage and practical class, appeared to think that his immediate business was to live; and having deprived himself of one comfort, to surround himself with others.

But however much inclined the good man was to be jocose and playful, and in the garden of his fancy to disport himself (if one may say so) like an architectural kitten, he had one impediment constantly opposed to him. The gentle Cherry, stung by a sense of slight and injury, which far from softening down or wearing out, rankled and festered in her heart - the gentle Cherry was in flat rebellion. She waged fierce war against her dear papa, she led her parent what is usually called, for want of a better figure of speech, the life of a dog. But never did that dog live, in kennel, stable-yard, or house, whose life was half as hard as Mr Pecksniff's with his gentle child.

The father and daughter were sitting at their breakfast. Tom had retired, and they were alone. Mr Pecksniff frowned at first; but having cleared his brow, looked stealthily at his child. Her nose was very red indeed, and screwed up tight, with hostile preparation.

'Cherry,' cried Mr Pecksniff, 'what is amiss between us? My child, why are we disunited?'

Miss Pecksniff's answer was scarcely a response to this gush of affection, for it was simply, 'Bother, Pa!'

'Bother!' repeated Mr Pecksniff, in a tone of anguish.

'Oh! 'tis too late, Pa,' said his daughter, calmly 'to talk to me like this. I know what it means, and what its value is.'

'This is hard!' cried Mr Pecksniff, addressing his breakfast-cup. 'This is very hard! She is my child. I carried her in my arms when she wore shapeless worsted shoes - I might say, mufflers - many years ago!'

'You needn't taunt me with that, Pa,' retorted Cherry, with a spiteful look. 'I am not so many years older than my sister, either, though she IS married to your friend!'

'Ah, human nature, human nature! Poor human nature!' said Mr Pecksniff, shaking his head at human nature, as if he didn't belong to it. 'To think that this discord should arise from such a cause! oh dear, oh dear!'

'From such a cause indeed!' cried Cherry. 'State the real cause, Pa, or I'll state it myself. Mind! I will!'

Perhaps the energy with which she said this was infectious. However that may be, Mr Pecksniff changed his tone and the expression of his face for one of anger, if not downright violence, when he said:

'You will! you have. You did yesterday. You do always. You have no decency; you make no secret of your temper; you have exposed yourself to Mr Chuzzlewit a hundred times.'

'Myself!' cried Cherry, with a bitter smile. 'Oh indeed! I don't mind that.'

'Me, too, then,' said Mr Pecksniff.

His daughter answered with a scornful laugh.

'And since we have come to an explanation, Charity,' said Mr Pecksniff, rolling his head portentously, 'let me tell you that I won't allow it. None of your nonsense, Miss! I won't permit it to be done.'

'I shall do,' said Charity, rocking her chair backwards and forwards, and raising her voice to a high pitch, 'I shall do, Pa, what I please and what I have done. I am not going to be crushed in everything, depend upon it. I've been more shamefully used than anybody ever was in this world,' here she began to cry and sob, 'and may expect the worse treatment from you, I know. But I don't care for that. No, I don't!'

Mr Pecksniff was made so desperate by the loud tone in which she spoke, that, after looking about him in frantic uncertainty for some means of softening it, he rose and shook her until the ornamental bow of hair upon her head nodded like a plume. She was so very much astonished by this assault, that it really had the desired effect.

'I'll do it again!' cried Mr Pecksniff, as he resumed his seat and fetched his breath, 'if you dare to talk in that loud manner. How do you mean about being shamefully used? If Mr Jonas chose your sister in preference to you, who could help it, I should wish to know? What have I to do with it?'

'Wasn't I made a convenience of? Weren't my feelings trifled with? Didn't he address himself to me first?' sobbed Cherry, clasping her hands; 'and oh, good gracious, that I should live to be shook!'

'You'll live to be shaken again,' returned her parent, 'if you drive me to that means of maintaining the decorum of this humble roof. You surprise me. I wonder you have not more spirit. If Mr Jonas didn't care for you, how could you wish to have him?'

'I wish to have him!' exclaimed Cherry. 'I wish to have him, Pa!'

'Then what are you making all this piece of work for,' retorted her father, 'if you didn't wish to have him?'

'Because I was treated with duplicity,' said Cherry; 'and because my own sister and my own father conspired against me. I am not angry with HER,' said Cherry; looking much more angry than ever. 'I pity her. I'm sorry for her. I know the fate that's in store for her, with that Wretch.'

'Mr Jonas will survive your calling him a wretch, my child, I dare say,' said Mr Pecksniff, with returning resignation; 'but call him what you like and make an end of it.'

'Not an end, Pa,' said Charity. 'No, not an end. That's not the only point on which we're not agreed. I won't submit to it. It's better you should know that at once. No; I won't submit to it indeed, Pa! I am not quite a fool, and I am not blind. All I have got to say is, I won't submit to it.'

Whatever she meant, she shook Mr Pecksniff now; for his lame attempt to seem composed was melancholy in the last degree. His anger changed to meekness, and his words were mild and fawning.

'My dear,' he said; 'if in the short excitement of an angry moment I resorted to an unjustifiable means of suppressing a little outbreak

calculated to injure you as well as myself - it's possible I may have done so; perhaps I did - I ask your pardon. A father asking pardon of his child,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'is, I believe, a spectacle to soften the most rugged nature.'

But it didn't at all soften Miss Pecksniff; perhaps because her nature was not rugged enough. On the contrary, she persisted in saying, over and over again, that she wasn't quite a fool, and wasn't blind, and wouldn't submit to it.

'You labour under some mistake, my child!' said Mr Pecksniff, 'but I will not ask you what it is; I don't desire to know. No, pray!' he added, holding out his hand and colouring again, 'let us avoid the subject, my dear, whatever it is!'

'It's quite right that the subject should be avoided between us, sir,' said Cherry. 'But I wish to be able to avoid it altogether, and consequently must beg you to provide me with a home.'

Mr Pecksniff looked about the room, and said, 'A home, my child!'

'Another home, papa,' said Cherry, with increasing stateliness 'Place me at Mrs Todgers's or somewhere, on an independent footing; but I will not live here, if such is to be the case.'

It is possible that Miss Pecksniff saw in Mrs Todgers's a vision of enthusiastic men, pining to fall in adoration at her feet. It is possible that Mr Pecksniff, in his new-born juvenility, saw, in the suggestion of that same establishment, an easy means of relieving himself from an irksome charge in the way of temper and watchfulness. It is undoubtedly a fact that in the attentive ears of Mr Pecksniff, the proposition did not sound quite like the dismal knell of all his hopes.

But he was a man of great feeling and acute sensibility; and he squeezed his pocket-handkerchief against his eyes with both hands - as such men always do, especially when they are observed. 'One of my birds,' Mr Pecksniff said, 'has left me for the stranger's breast; the other would take wing to Todgers's! Well, well, what am I? I don't know what I am, exactly. Never mind!'

Even this remark, made more pathetic perhaps by his breaking down in the middle of it, had no effect upon Charity. She was grim, rigid, and inflexible.

'But I have ever,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'sacrificed my children's happiness to my own - I mean my own happiness to my children's - and I will not begin to regulate my life by other rules of conduct now. If you can be happier at Mrs Todgers's than in your father's house, my dear, go to

Mrs Todgers's! Do not think of me, my girl!' said Mr Pecksniff with emotion; 'I shall get on pretty well, no doubt.'

Miss Charity, who knew he had a secret pleasure in the contemplation of the proposed change, suppressed her own, and went on to negotiate the terms. His views upon this subject were at first so very limited that another difference, involving possibly another shaking, threatened to ensue; but by degrees they came to something like an understanding, and the storm blew over. Indeed, Miss Charity's idea was so agreeable to both, that it would have been strange if they had not come to an amicable agreement. It was soon arranged between them that the project should be tried, and that immediately; and that Cherry's not being well, and needing change of scene, and wishing to be near her sister, should form the excuse for her departure to Mr Chuzzlewit and Mary, to both of whom she had pleaded indisposition for some time past. These premises agreed on, Mr Pecksniff gave her his blessing, with all the dignity of a self-denying man who had made a hard sacrifice, but comforted himself with the reflection that virtue is its own reward. Thus they were reconciled for the first time since that not easily forgiven night, when Mr Jonas, repudiating the elder, had confessed his passion for the younger sister, and Mr Pecksniff had abetted him on moral grounds.

But how happened it - in the name of an unexpected addition to that small family, the Seven Wonders of the World, whatever and wherever they may be, how happened it - that Mr Pecksniff and his daughter were about to part? How happened it that their mutual relations were so greatly altered? Why was Miss Pecksniff so clamorous to have it understood that she was neither blind nor foolish, and she wouldn't bear it? It is not possible that Mr Pecksniff had any thoughts of marrying again; or that his daughter, with the sharp eye of a single woman, fathomed his design!

Let us inquire into this.

Mr Pecksniff, as a man without reproach, from whom the breath of slander passed like common breath from any other polished surface, could afford to do what common men could not. He knew the purity of his own motives; and when he had a motive worked at it as only a very good man (or a very bad one) can. Did he set before himself any strong and palpable motives for taking a second wife? Yes; and not one or two of them, but a combination of very many.

Old Martin Chuzzlewit had gradually undergone an important change. Even upon the night when he made such an ill-timed arrival at Mr Pecksniff's house, he was comparatively subdued and easy to deal with. This Mr Pecksniff attributed, at the time, to the effect his brother's death had had upon him. But from that hour his character

seemed to have modified by regular degrees, and to have softened down into a dull indifference for almost every one but Mr Pecksniff. His looks were much the same as ever, but his mind was singularly altered. It was not that this or that passion stood out in brighter or in dimmer hues; but that the colour of the whole man was faded. As one trait disappeared, no other trait sprung up to take its place. His senses dwindled too. He was less keen of sight; was deaf sometimes; took little notice of what passed before him; and would be profoundly taciturn for days together. The process of this alteration was so easy that almost as soon as it began to be observed it was complete. But Mr Pecksniff saw it first, and having Anthony Chuzzlewit fresh in his recollection, saw in his brother Martin the same process of decay.

To a gentleman of Mr Pecksniff's tenderness, this was a very mournful sight. He could not but foresee the probability of his respected relative being made the victim of designing persons, and of his riches falling into worthless hands. It gave him so much pain that he resolved to secure the property to himself; to keep bad testamentary suitors at a distance; to wall up the old gentleman, as it were, for his own use. By little and little, therefore, he began to try whether Mr Chuzzlewit gave any promise of becoming an instrument in his hands, and finding that he did, and indeed that he was very supple in his plastic fingers, he made it the business of his life - kind soul! - to establish an ascendancy over him; and every little test he durst apply meeting with a success beyond his hopes, he began to think he heard old Martin's cash already chinking in his own unworldly pockets.

But when Mr Pecksniff pondered on this subject (as, in his zealous way, he often did), and thought with an uplifted heart of the train of circumstances which had delivered the old gentleman into his hands for the confusion of evil-doers and the triumph of a righteous nature, he always felt that Mary Graham was his stumbling-block. Let the old man say what he would, Mr Pecksniff knew he had a strong affection for her. He knew that he showed it in a thousand little ways; that he liked to have her near him, and was never quite at ease when she was absent long. That he had ever really sworn to leave her nothing in his will, Mr Pecksniff greatly doubted. That even if he had, there were many ways by which he could evade the oath and satisfy his conscience, Mr Pecksniff knew. That her unprotected state was no light burden on the old man's mind, he also knew, for Mr Chuzzlewit had plainly told him so. 'Then,' said Mr Pecksniff 'what if I married her! What,' repeated Mr Pecksniff, sticking up his hair and glancing at his bust by Spoker; 'what if, making sure of his approval first - he is nearly imbecile, poor gentleman - I married her!'

Mr Pecksniff had a lively sense of the Beautiful; especially in women. His manner towards the sex was remarkable for its insinuating character. It is recorded of him in another part of these pages, that he

embraced Mrs Todgers on the smallest provocation; and it was a way he had; it was a part of the gentle placidity of his disposition. Before any thought of matrimony was in his mind, he had bestowed on Mary many little tokens of his spiritual admiration. They had been indignantly received, but that was nothing. True, as the idea expanded within him, these had become too ardent to escape the piercing eye of Cherry, who read his scheme at once; but he had always felt the power of Mary's charms. So Interest and Inclination made a pair, and drew the curricule of Mr Pecksniff's plan.

As to any thought of revenging himself on young Martin for his insolent expressions when they parted, and of shutting him out still more effectually from any hope of reconciliation with his grandfather, Mr Pecksniff was much too meek and forgiving to be suspected of harbouring it. As to being refused by Mary, Mr Pecksniff was quite satisfied that in her position she could never hold out if he and Mr Chuzzlewit were both against her. As to consulting the wishes of her heart in such a case, it formed no part of Mr Pecksniff's moral code; for he knew what a good man he was, and what a blessing he must be to anybody. His daughter having broken the ice, and the murder being out between them, Mr Pecksniff had now only to pursue his design as cleverly as he could, and by the craftiest approaches.

'Well, my good sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, meeting old Martin in the garden, for it was his habit to walk in and out by that way, as the fancy took him; 'and how is my dear friend this delicious morning?'

'Do you mean me?' asked the old man.

'Ah!' said Mr Pecksniff, 'one of his deaf days, I see. Could I mean any one else, my dear sir?'

'You might have meant Mary,' said the old man.

'Indeed I might. Quite true. I might speak of her as a dear, dear friend, I hope?' observed Mr Pecksniff.

'I hope so,' returned old Martin. 'I think she deserves it.'

'Think!' cried Pecksniff, 'think, Mr Chuzzlewit!'

'You are speaking, I know,' returned Martin, 'but I don't catch what you say. Speak up!'

'He's getting deafer than a flint,' said Pecksniff. 'I was saying, my dear sir, that I am afraid I must make up my mind to part with Cherry.'

'What has SHE been doing?' asked the old man.

'He puts the most ridiculous questions I ever heard!' muttered Mr Pecksniff. 'He's a child to-day.' After which he added, in a mild roar: 'She hasn't been doing anything, my dear friend.'

'What are you going to part with her for?' demanded Martin.

'She hasn't her health by any means,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'She misses her sister, my dear sir; they doted on each other from the cradle. And I think of giving her a run in London for a change. A good long run, sir, if I find she likes it.'

'Quite right,' cried Martin. 'It's judicious.'

'I am glad to hear you say so. I hope you mean to bear me company in this dull part, while she's away?' said Mr Pecksniff.

'I have no intention of removing from it,' was Martin's answer.

'Then why,' said Mr Pecksniff, taking the old man's arm in his, and walking slowly on; 'Why, my good sir, can't you come and stay with me? I am sure I could surround you with more comforts - lowly as is my Cot - than you can obtain at a village house of entertainment. And pardon me, Mr Chuzzlewit, pardon me if I say that such a place as the Dragon, however well-conducted (and, as far as I know, Mrs Lupin is one of the worthiest creatures in this county), is hardly a home for Miss Graham.'

Martin mused a moment; and then said, as he shook him by the hand:

'No. You're quite right; it is not.'

'The very sight of skittles,' Mr Pecksniff eloquently pursued, 'is far from being congenial to a delicate mind.'

'It's an amusement of the vulgar,' said old Martin, 'certainly.'

'Of the very vulgar,' Mr Pecksniff answered. 'Then why not bring Miss Graham here, sir? Here is the house. Here am I alone in it, for Thomas Pinch I do not count as any one. Our lovely friend shall occupy my daughter's chamber; you shall choose your own; we shall not quarrel, I hope!'

'We are not likely to do that,' said Martin.

Mr Pecksniff pressed his hand. 'We understand each other, my dear sir, I see! - I can wind him,' he thought, with exultation, 'round my little finger.'

'You leave the recompense to me?' said the old man, after a minute's silence.

'Oh! do not speak of recompense!' cried Pecksniff.

'I say,' repeated Martin, with a glimmer of his old obstinacy, 'you leave the recompense to me. Do you?'

'Since you desire it, my good sir.'

'I always desire it,' said the old man. 'You know I always desire it. I wish to pay as I go, even when I buy of you. Not that I do not leave a balance to be settled one day, Pecksniff.'

The architect was too much overcome to speak. He tried to drop a tear upon his patron's hand, but couldn't find one in his dry distillery.

'May that day be very distant!' was his pious exclamation. 'Ah, sir! If I could say how deep an interest I have in you and yours! I allude to our beautiful young friend.'

'True,' he answered. 'True. She need have some one interested in her. I did her wrong to train her as I did. Orphan though she was, she would have found some one to protect her whom she might have loved again. When she was a child, I pleased myself with the thought that in gratifying my whim of placing her between me and false-hearted knaves, I had done her a kindness. Now she is a woman, I have no such comfort. She has no protector but herself. I have put her at such odds with the world, that any dog may bark or fawn upon her at his pleasure. Indeed she stands in need of delicate consideration. Yes; indeed she does!'

'If her position could be altered and defined, sir?' Mr Pecksniff hinted.

'How can that be done? Should I make a seamstress of her, or a governess?'

'Heaven forbid!' said Mr Pecksniff. 'My dear sir, there are other ways. There are indeed. But I am much excited and embarrassed at present, and would rather not pursue the subject. I scarcely know what I mean. Permit me to resume it at another time.'

'You are not unwell?' asked Martin anxiously.

'No, no!' cried Pecksniff. 'No. Permit me to resume it at another time. I'll walk a little. Bless you!'

Old Martin blessed him in return, and squeezed his hand. As he turned away, and slowly walked towards the house, Mr Pecksniff stood gazing after him; being pretty well recovered from his late emotion, which, in any other man, one might have thought had been assumed as a machinery for feeling Martin's pulse. The change in the old man found such a slight expression in his figure, that Mr Pecksniff, looking after him, could not help saying to himself:

'And I can wind him round my little finger! Only think!'

Old Martin happening to turn his head, saluted him affectionately. Mr Pecksniff returned the gesture.

'Why, the time was,' said Mr Pecksniff; 'and not long ago, when he wouldn't look at me! How soothing is this change. Such is the delicate texture of the human heart; so complicated is the process of its being softened! Externally he looks the same, and I can wind him round my little finger. Only think!'

In sober truth, there did appear to be nothing on which Mr Pecksniff might not have ventured with Martin Chuzzlewit; for whatever Mr Pecksniff said or did was right, and whatever he advised was done. Martin had escaped so many snares from needy fortune-hunters, and had withered in the shell of his suspicion and distrust for so many years, but to become the good man's tool and plaything. With the happiness of this conviction painted on his face, the architect went forth upon his morning walk.

The summer weather in his bosom was reflected in the breast of Nature. Through deep green vistas where the boughs arched overhead, and showed the sunlight flashing in the beautiful perspective; through dewy fern from which the startled hares leaped up, and fled at his approach; by mantled pools, and fallen trees, and down in hollow places, rustling among last year's leaves whose scent woke memory of the past; the placid Pecksniff strolled. By meadow gates and hedges fragrant with wild roses; and by thatched-roof cottages whose inmates humbly bowed before him as a man both good and wise; the worthy Pecksniff walked in tranquil meditation. The bee passed onward, humming of the work he had to do; the idle gnats for ever going round and round in one contracting and expanding ring, yet always going on as fast as he, danced merrily before him; the colour of the long grass came and went, as if the light clouds made it timid as they floated through the distant air. The birds, so many Pecksniff consciences, sang gayly upon every branch; and Mr Pecksniff paid HIS homage to the day by ruminating on his projects as he walked along.

Chancing to trip, in his abstraction, over the spreading root of an old tree, he raised his pious eyes to take a survey of the ground before him. It startled him to see the embodied image of his thoughts not far ahead. Mary herself. And alone.

At first Mr Pecksniff stopped as if with the intention of avoiding her; but his next impulse was to advance, which he did at a brisk pace; caroling as he went so sweetly and with so much innocence that he only wanted feathers and wings to be a bird.

Hearing notes behind her, not belonging to the songsters of the grove, she looked round. Mr Pecksniff kissed his hand, and was at her side immediately.

'Communing with nature?' said Mr Pecksniff. 'So am I.'

She said the morning was so beautiful that she had walked further than she intended, and would return. Mr Pecksniff said it was exactly his case, and he would return with her.

'Take my arm, sweet girl,' said Mr Pecksniff.

Mary declined it, and walked so very fast that he remonstrated. 'You were loitering when I came upon you,' Mr Pecksniff said. 'Why be so cruel as to hurry now? You would not shun me, would you?'

'Yes, I would,' she answered, turning her glowing cheek indignantly upon him, 'you know I would. Release me, Mr Pecksniff. Your touch is disagreeable to me.'

His touch! What? That chaste patriarchal touch which Mrs Todgers - surely a discreet lady - had endured, not only without complaint, but with apparent satisfaction! This was positively wrong. Mr Pecksniff was sorry to hear her say it.

'If you have not observed,' said Mary, 'that it is so, pray take assurance from my lips, and do not, as you are a gentleman, continue to offend me.'

'Well, well!' said Mr Pecksniff, mildly, 'I feel that I might consider this becoming in a daughter of my own, and why should I object to it in one so beautiful! It's harsh. It cuts me to the soul,' said Mr Pecksniff; 'but I cannot quarrel with you, Mary.'

She tried to say she was sorry to hear it, but burst into tears. Mr Pecksniff now repeated the Todgers performance on a comfortable scale, as if he intended it to last some time; and in his disengaged hand, catching hers, employed himself in separating the fingers with

his own, and sometimes kissing them, as he pursued the conversation thus:

'I am glad we met. I am very glad we met. I am able now to ease my bosom of a heavy load, and speak to you in confidence. Mary,' said Mr Pecksniff in his tenderest tones, indeed they were so very tender that he almost squeaked: 'My soul! I love you!'

A fantastic thing, that maiden affectation! She made believe to shudder.

'I love you,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'my gentle life, with a devotion which is quite surprising, even to myself. I did suppose that the sensation was buried in the silent tomb of a lady, only second to you in qualities of the mind and form; but I find I am mistaken.'

She tried to disengage her hand, but might as well have tried to free herself from the embrace of an affectionate boa-constrictor; if anything so wily may be brought into comparison with Pecksniff.

'Although I am a widower,' said Mr Pecksniff, examining the rings upon her fingers, and tracing the course of one delicate blue vein with his fat thumb, 'a widower with two daughters, still I am not encumbered, my love. One of them, as you know, is married. The other, by her own desire, but with a view, I will confess - why not? - to my altering my condition, is about to leave her father's house. I have a character, I hope. People are pleased to speak well of me, I think. My person and manner are not absolutely those of a monster, I trust. Ah! naughty Hand!' said Mr Pecksniff, apostrophizing the reluctant prize, 'why did you take me prisoner? Go, go!'

He slapped the hand to punish it; but relenting, folded it in his waistcoat to comfort it again.

'Blessed in each other, and in the society of our venerable friend, my darling,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'we shall be happy. When he is wafted to a haven of rest, we will console each other. My pretty primrose, what do you say?'

'It is possible,' Mary answered, in a hurried manner, 'that I ought to feel grateful for this mark of your confidence. I cannot say that I do, but I am willing to suppose you may deserve my thanks. Take them; and pray leave me, Mr Pecksniff.'

The good man smiled a greasy smile; and drew her closer to him.

'Pray, pray release me, Mr Pecksniff. I cannot listen to your proposal. I cannot receive it. There are many to whom it may be acceptable, but it is not so to me. As an act of kindness and an act of pity, leave me!'

Mr Pecksniff walked on with his arm round her waist, and her hand in his, as contentedly as if they had been all in all to each other, and were joined in the bonds of truest love.

'If you force me by your superior strength,' said Mary, who finding that good words had not the least effect upon him, made no further effort to suppress her indignation; 'if you force me by your superior strength to accompany you back, and to be the subject of your insolence upon the way, you cannot constrain the expression of my thoughts. I hold you in the deepest abhorrence. I know your real nature and despise it.'

'No, no,' said Mr Pecksniff, sweetly. 'No, no, no!'

'By what arts or unhappy chances you have gained your influence over Mr Chuzzlewit, I do not know,' said Mary; 'it may be strong enough to soften even this, but he shall know of this, trust me, sir.'

Mr Pecksniff raised his heavy eyelids languidly, and let them fall again. It was saying with perfect coolness, 'Aye, aye! Indeed!'

'Is it not enough,' said Mary, 'that you warp and change his nature, adapt his every prejudice to your bad ends, and harden a heart naturally kind by shutting out the truth and allowing none but false and distorted views to reach it; is it not enough that you have the power of doing this, and that you exercise it, but must you also be so coarse, so cruel, and so cowardly to me?' Still Mr Pecksniff led her calmly on, and looked as mild as any lamb that ever pastured in the fields.

'Will nothing move you, sir?' cried Mary.

'My dear,' observed Mr Pecksniff, with a placid leer, 'a habit of self-examination, and the practice of - shall I say of virtue?'

'Of hypocrisy,' said Mary.

'No, no,' resumed Mr Pecksniff, chafing the captive hand reproachfully, 'of virtue - have enabled me to set such guards upon myself, that it is really difficult to ruffle me. It is a curious fact, but it is difficult, do you know, for any one to ruffle me. And did she think,' said Mr Pecksniff, with a playful tightening of his grasp 'that SHE could! How little did she know his heart!'

Little, indeed! Her mind was so strangely constituted that she would have preferred the caresses of a toad, an adder, or a serpent - nay, the hug of a bear - to the endearments of Mr Pecksniff.

'Come, come,' said that good gentleman, 'a word or two will set this matter right, and establish a pleasant understanding between us. I am not angry, my love.'

'YOU angry!'

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'I am not. I say so. Neither are you.'

There was a beating heart beneath his hand that told another story though.

'I am sure you are not,' said Mr Pecksniff: 'and I will tell you why. There are two Martin Chuzzlewits, my dear; and your carrying your anger to one might have a serious effect - who knows! - upon the other. You wouldn't wish to hurt him, would you?'

She trembled violently, and looked at him with such a proud disdain that he turned his eyes away. No doubt lest he should be offended with her in spite of his better self.

'A passive quarrel, my love,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'may be changed into an active one, remember. It would be sad to blight even a disinherited young man in his already blighted prospects; but how easy to do it. Ah, how easy! HAVE I influence with our venerable friend, do you think? Well, perhaps I have. Perhaps I have.'

He raised his eyes to hers; and nodded with an air of banter that was charming.

'No,' he continued, thoughtfully. 'Upon the whole, my sweet, if I were you I'd keep my secret to myself. I am not at all sure - very far from it - that it would surprise our friend in any way, for he and I have had some conversation together only this morning, and he is anxious, very anxious, to establish you in some more settled manner. But whether he was surprised or not surprised, the consequence of your imparting it might be the same. Martin junior might suffer severely. I'd have compassion on Martin junior, do you know?' said Mr Pecksniff, with a persuasive smile. 'Yes. He don't deserve it, but I would.'

She wept so bitterly now, and was so much distressed, that he thought it prudent to unclasp her waist, and hold her only by the hand.

'As to our own share in the precious little mystery,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'we will keep it to ourselves, and talk of it between ourselves, and you shall think it over. You will consent, my love; you will consent, I know. Whatever you may think; you will. I seem to remember to have heard - I really don't know where, or how' - he added, with bewitching frankness, 'that you and Martin junior, when you were children, had a sort of childish fondness for each other. When we are married, you shall have the satisfaction of thinking that it didn't last to ruin him, but passed away to do him good; for we'll see then what we can do to put some trifling help in Martin junior's way. HAVE I any influence with our venerable friend? Well! Perhaps I have. Perhaps I have.'

The outlet from the wood in which these tender passages occurred, was close to Mr Pecksniff's house. They were now so near it that he stopped, and holding up her little finger, said in playful accents, as a parting fancy:

'Shall I bite it?'

Receiving no reply he kissed it instead; and then stooping down, inclined his flabby face to hers - he had a flabby face, although he WAS a good man - and with a blessing, which from such a source was quite enough to set her up in life, and prosper her from that time forth permitted her to leave him.

Gallantry in its true sense is supposed to ennoble and dignify a man; and love has shed refinements on innumerable Cymons. But Mr Pecksniff - perhaps because to one of his exalted nature these were mere grossnesses - certainly did not appear to any unusual advantage, now that he was left alone. On the contrary, he seemed to be shrunk and reduced; to be trying to hide himself within himself; and to be wretched at not having the power to do it. His shoes looked too large; his sleeve looked too long; his hair looked too limp; his features looked too mean; his exposed throat looked as if a halter would have done it good. For a minute or two, in fact, he was hot, and pale, and mean, and shy, and slinking, and consequently not at all Pecksniffian. But after that, he recovered himself, and went home with as beneficent an air as if he had been the High Priest of the summer weather.

'I have arranged to go, Papa,' said Charity, 'to-morrow.'

'So soon, my child!'

'I can't go too soon,' said Charity, 'under the circumstances. I have written to Mrs Todgers to propose an arrangement, and have requested her to meet me at the coach, at all events. You'll be quite your own master now, Mr Pinch!'

Mr Pecksniff had just gone out of the room, and Tom had just come into it.

'My own master!' repeated Tom.

'Yes, you'll have nobody to interfere with you,' said Charity. 'At least I hope you won't. Hem! It's a changing world.'

'What! are YOU going to be married, Miss Pecksniff?' asked Tom in great surprise.

'Not exactly,' faltered Cherry. 'I haven't made up my mind to be. I believe I could be, if I chose, Mr Pinch.'

'Of course you could!' said Tom. And he said it in perfect good faith. He believed it from the bottom of his heart.

'No,' said Cherry, 'I am not going to be married. Nobody is, that I know of. Hem! But I am not going to live with Papa. I have my reasons, but it's all a secret. I shall always feel very kindly towards you, I assure you, for the boldness you showed that night. As to you and me, Mr Pinch, WE part the best friends possible!'

Tom thanked her for her confidence, and for her friendship, but there was a mystery in the former which perfectly bewildered him. In his extravagant devotion to the family, he had felt the loss of Merry more than any one but those who knew that for all the slights he underwent he thought his own demerits were to blame, could possibly have understood. He had scarcely reconciled himself to that when here was Charity about to leave them. She had grown up, as it were, under Tom's eye. The sisters were a part of Pecksniff, and a part of Tom; items in Pecksniff's goodness, and in Tom's service. He couldn't bear it; not two hours' sleep had Tom that night, through dwelling in his bed upon these dreadful changes.

When morning dawned he thought he must have dreamed this piece of ambiguity; but no, on going downstairs he found them packing trunks and cording boxes, and making other preparations for Miss Charity's departure, which lasted all day long. In good time for the evening coach, Miss Charity deposited her housekeeping keys with much ceremony upon the parlour table; took a gracious leave of all the house; and quitted her paternal roof - a blessing for which the Pecksniffian servant was observed by some profane persons to be particularly active in the thanksgiving at church next Sunday.