

## **Chapter XXXV**

### **Arriving In England, Martin Witnesses A Ceremony, From Which He Derives The Cheering Information That He Has Not Been Forgotten In His Absence**

It was mid-day, and high water in the English port for which the Screw was bound, when, borne in gallantly upon the fullness of the tide, she let go her anchor in the river.

Bright as the scene was; fresh, and full of motion; airy, free, and sparkling; it was nothing to the life and exultation in the breasts of the two travellers, at sight of the old churches, roofs, and darkened chimney stacks of Home. The distant roar that swelled up hoarsely from the busy streets, was music in their ears; the lines of people gazing from the wharves, were friends held dear; the canopy of smoke that overhung the town was brighter and more beautiful to them than if the richest silks of Persia had been waving in the air. And though the water going on its glistening track, turned, ever and again, aside to dance and sparkle round great ships, and heave them up; and leaped from off the blades of oars, a shower of diving diamonds; and wantoned with the idle boats, and swiftly passed, in many a sportive chase, through obdurate old iron rings, set deep into the stone-work of the quays; not even it was half so buoyant, and so restless, as their fluttering hearts, when yearning to set foot, once more, on native ground.

A year had passed since those same spires and roofs had faded from their eyes. It seemed to them, a dozen years. Some trifling changes, here and there, they called to mind; and wondered that they were so few and slight. In health and fortune, prospect and resource, they came back poorer men than they had gone away. But it was home. And though home is a name, a word, it is a strong one; stronger than magician ever spoke, or spirit answered to, in strongest conjuration.

Being set ashore, with very little money in their pockets, and no definite plan of operation in their heads, they sought out a cheap tavern, where they regaled upon a smoking steak, and certain flowing mugs of beer, as only men just landed from the sea can revel in the generous dainties of the earth. When they had feasted, as two grateful-tempered giants might have done, they stirred the fire, drew back the glowing curtain from the window, and making each a sofa for himself, by union of the great unwieldy chairs, gazed blissfully into the street.

Even the street was made a fairy street, by being half hidden in an atmosphere of steam, and strong, stout, stand-up English beer. For on the window-glass hung such a mist, that Mr Tapley was obliged to rise

and wipe it with his handkerchief, before the passengers appeared like common mortals. And even then, a spiral little cloud went curling up from their two glasses of hot grog, which nearly hid them from each other.

It was one of those unaccountable little rooms which are never seen anywhere but in a tavern, and are supposed to have got into taverns by reason of the facilities afforded to the architect for getting drunk while engaged in their construction. It had more corners in it than the brain of an obstinate man; was full of mad closets, into which nothing could be put that was not specially invented and made for that purpose; had mysterious shelvings and bulkheads, and indications of staircases in the ceiling; and was elaborately provided with a bell that rung in the room itself, about two feet from the handle, and had no connection whatever with any other part of the establishment. It was a little below the pavement, and abutted close upon it; so that passengers grated against the window-panes with their buttons, and scraped it with their baskets; and fearful boys suddenly coming between a thoughtful guest and the light, derided him, or put out their tongues as if he were a physician; or made white knobs on the ends of their noses by flattening the same against the glass, and vanished awfully, like spectres.

Martin and Mark sat looking at the people as they passed, debating every now and then what their first step should be.

'We want to see Miss Mary, of course,' said Mark.

'Of course,' said Martin. 'But I don't know where she is. Not having had the heart to write in our distress - you yourself thought silence most advisable - and consequently, never having heard from her since we left New York the first time, I don't know where she is, my good fellow.'

'My opinion is, sir,' returned Mark, 'that what we've got to do is to travel straight to the Dragon. There's no need for you to go there, where you're known, unless you like. You may stop ten mile short of it. I'll go on. Mrs Lupin will tell me all the news. Mr Pinch will give me every information that we want; and right glad Mr Pinch will be to do it. My proposal is: To set off walking this afternoon. To stop when we are tired. To get a lift when we can. To walk when we can't. To do it at once, and do it cheap.'

'Unless we do it cheap, we shall have some difficulty in doing it at all,' said Martin, pulling out the bank, and telling it over in his hand.

'The greater reason for losing no time, sir,' replied Mark. 'Whereas, when you've seen the young lady; and know what state of mind the old gentleman's in, and all about it; then you'll know what to do next.'

'No doubt,' said Martin. 'You are quite right.'

They were raising their glasses to their lips, when their hands stopped midway, and their gaze was arrested by a figure which slowly, very slowly, and reflectively, passed the window at that moment.

Mr Pecksniff. Placid, calm, but proud. Honestly proud. Dressed with peculiar care, smiling with even more than usual blandness, pondering on the beauties of his art with a mild abstraction from all sordid thoughts, and gently travelling across the disc, as if he were a figure in a magic lantern.

As Mr Pecksniff passed, a person coming in the opposite direction stopped to look after him with great interest and respect, almost with veneration; and the landlord bouncing out of the house, as if he had seen him too, joined this person, and spoke to him, and shook his head gravely, and looked after Mr Pecksniff likewise.

Martin and Mark sat staring at each other, as if they could not believe it; but there stood the landlord, and the other man still. In spite of the indignation with which this glimpse of Mr Pecksniff had inspired him, Martin could not help laughing heartily. Neither could Mark.

'We must inquire into this!' said Martin. 'Ask the landlord in, Mark.'

Mr Tapley retired for that purpose, and immediately returned with their large-headed host in safe convoy.

'Pray, landlord!' said Martin, 'who is that gentleman who passed just now, and whom you were looking after?'

The landlord poked the fire as if, in his desire to make the most of his answer, he had become indifferent even to the price of coals; and putting his hands in his pockets, said, after inflating himself to give still further effect to his reply:

'That, gentlemen, is the great Mr Pecksniff! The celebrated architect, gentlemen!'

He looked from one to the other while he said it, as if he were ready to assist the first man who might be overcome by the intelligence.

'The great Mr Pecksniff, the celebrated architect, gentlemen,' said the landlord, 'has come down here, to help to lay the first stone of a new and splendid public building.'

'Is it to be built from his designs?' asked Martin.

'The great Mr Pecksniff, the celebrated architect, gentlemen,' returned the landlord, who seemed to have an unspeakable delight in the repetition of these words, 'carried off the First Premium, and will erect the building.'

'Who lays the stone?' asked Martin.

'Our member has come down express,' returned the landlord. 'No scrubs would do for no such a purpose. Nothing less would satisfy our Directors than our member in the House of Commons, who is returned upon the Gentlemanly Interest.'

'Which interest is that?' asked Martin.

'What, don't you know!' returned the landlord.

It was quite clear the landlord didn't. They always told him at election time, that it was the Gentlemanly side, and he immediately put on his top-boots, and voted for it.

'When does the ceremony take place?' asked Martin.

'This day,' replied the landlord. Then pulling out his watch, he added, impressively, 'almost this minute.'

Martin hastily inquired whether there was any possibility of getting in to witness it; and finding that there would be no objection to the admittance of any decent person, unless indeed the ground were full, hurried off with Mark, as hard as they could go.

They were fortunate enough to squeeze themselves into a famous corner on the ground, where they could see all that passed, without much dread of being beheld by Mr Pecksniff in return. They were not a minute too soon, for as they were in the act of congratulating each other, a great noise was heard at some distance, and everybody looked towards the gate. Several ladies prepared their pocket handkerchiefs for waving; and a stray teacher belonging to the charity school being much cheered by mistake, was immensely groaned at when detected.

'Perhaps he has Tom Pinch with him,' Martin whispered Mr Tapley.

'It would be rather too much of a treat for him, wouldn't it, sir?' whispered Mr Tapley in return.

There was no time to discuss the probabilities either way, for the charity school, in clean linen, came filing in two and two, so much to the self-approval of all the people present who didn't subscribe to it, that many of them shed tears. A band of music followed, led by a conscientious drummer who never left off. Then came a great many gentlemen with wands in their hands, and bows on their breasts, whose share in the proceedings did not appear to be distinctly laid down, and who trod upon each other, and blocked up the entry for a considerable period. These were followed by the Mayor and Corporation, all clustering round the member for the Gentlemanly Interest; who had the great Mr Pecksniff, the celebrated architect on his right hand, and conversed with him familiarly as they came along. Then the ladies waved their handkerchiefs, and the gentlemen their hats, and the charity children shrieked, and the member for the Gentlemanly Interest bowed.

Silence being restored, the member for the Gentlemanly Interest rubbed his hands, and wagged his head, and looked about him pleasantly; and there was nothing this member did, at which some lady or other did not burst into an ecstatic waving of her pocket handkerchief. When he looked up at the stone, they said how graceful! when he peeped into the hole, they said how condescending! when he chatted with the Mayor, they said how easy! when he folded his arms they cried with one accord, how statesman-like!

Mr Pecksniff was observed too, closely. When he talked to the Mayor, they said, Oh, really, what a courtly man he was! When he laid his hand upon the mason's shoulder, giving him directions, how pleasant his demeanour to the working classes; just the sort of man who made their toil a pleasure to them, poor dear souls!

But now a silver trowel was brought; and when the member for the Gentlemanly Interest, tucking up his coat-sleeve, did a little sleight of hand with the mortar, the air was rent, so loud was the applause. The workman-like manner in which he did it was amazing. No one could conceive where such a gentlemanly creature could have picked the knowledge up.

When he had made a kind of dirt-pie under the direction of the mason, they brought a little vase containing coins, the which the member for the Gentlemanly Interest jingled, as if he were going to conjure. Whereat they said how droll, how cheerful, what a flow of spirits! This put into its place, an ancient scholar read the inscription, which was in Latin; not in English; that would never do. It gave great satisfaction; especially every time there was a good long substantive in

the third declension, ablative case, with an adjective to match; at which periods the assembly became very tender, and were much affected.

And now the stone was lowered down into its place, amidst the shouting of the concourse. When it was firmly fixed, the member for the Gentlemanly Interest struck upon it thrice with the handle of the trowel, as if inquiring, with a touch of humour, whether anybody was at home. Mr Pecksniff then unrolled his Plans (prodigious plans they were), and people gathered round to look at and admire them.

Martin, who had been fretting himself - quite unnecessarily, as Mark thought - during the whole of these proceedings, could no longer restrain his impatience; but stepping forward among several others, looked straight over the shoulder of the unconscious Mr Pecksniff, at the designs and plans he had unrolled. He returned to Mark, boiling with rage.

'Why, what's the matter, sir?' cried Mark. 'Matter! This is MY building.'

'Your building, sir!' said Mark.

'My grammar-school. I invented it. I did it all. He has only put four windows in, the villain, and spoilt it!'

Mark could hardly believe it at first, but being assured that it was really so, actually held him to prevent his interference foolishly, until his temporary heat was past. In the meantime, the member addressed the company on the gratifying deed which he had just performed.

He said that since he had sat in Parliament to represent the Gentlemanly Interest of that town; and he might add, the Lady Interest, he hoped, besides (pocket handkerchiefs); it had been his pleasant duty to come among them, and to raise his voice on their behalf in Another Place (pocket handkerchiefs and laughter), often. But he had never come among them, and had never raised his voice, with half such pure, such deep, such unalloyed delight, as now. 'The present occasion,' he said, 'will ever be memorable to me; not only for the reasons I have assigned, but because it has afforded me an opportunity of becoming personally known to a gentleman - '

Here he pointed the trowel at Mr Pecksniff, who was greeted with vociferous cheering, and laid his hand upon his heart.

'To a gentleman who, I am happy to believe, will reap both distinction and profit from this field; whose fame had previously penetrated to me - as to whose ears has it not! - but whose intellectual countenance I never had the distinguished honour to behold until this day, and

whose intellectual conversation I had never before the improving pleasure to enjoy.'

Everybody seemed very glad of this, and applauded more than ever.

'But I hope my Honourable Friend,' said the Gentlemanly member - of course he added 'if he will allow me to call him so,' and of course Mr Pecksniff bowed - 'will give me many opportunities of cultivating the knowledge of him; and that I may have the extraordinary gratification of reflecting in after-time that I laid on this day two first stones, both belonging to structures which shall last my life!'

Great cheering again. All this time, Martin was cursing Mr Pecksniff up hill and down dale.

'My friends!' said Mr Pecksniff, in reply. 'My duty is to build, not speak; to act, not talk; to deal with marble, stone, and brick; not language. I am very much affected. God bless you!'

This address, pumped out apparently from Mr Pecksniff's very heart, brought the enthusiasm to its highest pitch. The pocket handkerchiefs were waved again; the charity children were admonished to grow up Pecksniffs, every boy among them; the Corporation, gentlemen with wands, member for the Gentlemanly Interest, all cheered for Mr Pecksniff. Three cheers for Mr Pecksniff! Three more for Mr Pecksniff! Three more for Mr Pecksniff, gentlemen, if you please! One more, gentlemen, for Mr Pecksniff, and let it be a good one to finish with!

In short, Mr Pecksniff was supposed to have done a great work and was very kindly, courteously, and generously rewarded. When the procession moved away, and Martin and Mark were left almost alone upon the ground, his merits and a desire to acknowledge them formed the common topic. He was only second to the Gentlemanly member.

'Compare the fellow's situation to-day with ours!' said Martin bitterly.

'Lord bless you, sir!' cried Mark, 'what's the use? Some architects are clever at making foundations, and some architects are clever at building on 'em when they're made. But it'll all come right in the end, sir; it'll all come right!'

'And in the meantime - ' began Martin.

'In the meantime, as you say, sir, we have a deal to do, and far to go. So sharp's the word, and Jolly!'

'You are the best master in the world, Mark,' said Martin, 'and I will not be a bad scholar if I can help it, I am resolved! So come! Best foot foremost, old fellow!'