

Chapter XLIII

Has An Influence On The Fortunes Of Several People. Mr Pecksniff Is Exhibited In The Plenitude Of Power; And Wields The Same With Fortitude And Magnanimity

On the night of the storm, Mrs Lupin, hostess of the Blue Dragon, sat by herself in her little bar. Her solitary condition, or the bad weather, or both united, made Mrs Lupin thoughtful, not to say sorrowful. As she sat with her chin upon her hand, looking out through a low back lattice, rendered dim in the brightest day-time by clustering vine-leaves, she shook her head very often, and said, 'Dear me! Oh, dear, dear me!'

It was a melancholy time, even in the snugness of the Dragon bar. The rich expanse of corn-field, pasture-land, green slope, and gentle undulation, with its sparkling brooks, its many hedgerows, and its clumps of beautiful trees, was black and dreary, from the diamond panes of the lattice away to the far horizon, where the thunder seemed to roll along the hills. The heavy rain beat down the tender branches of vine and jessamine, and trampled on them in its fury; and when the lightning gleamed it showed the tearful leaves shivering and cowering together at the window, and tapping at it urgently, as if beseeching to be sheltered from the dismal night.

As a mark of her respect for the lightning, Mrs Lupin had removed her candle to the chimney-piece. Her basket of needle-work stood unheeded at her elbow; her supper, spread on a round table not far off, was untasted; and the knives had been removed for fear of attraction. She had sat for a long time with her chin upon her hand, saying to herself at intervals, 'Dear me! Ah, dear, dear me!'

She was on the eve of saying so, once more, when the latch of the house-door (closed to keep the rain out), rattled on its well-worn catch, and a traveller came in, who, shutting it after him, and walking straight up to the half-door of the bar, said, rather gruffly:

'A pint of the best old beer here.'

He had some reason to be gruff, for if he had passed the day in a waterfall, he could scarcely have been wetter than he was. He was wrapped up to the eyes in a rough blue sailor's coat, and had an oil-skin hat on, from the capacious brim of which the rain fell trickling down upon his breast, and back, and shoulders. Judging from a certain liveliness of chin - he had so pulled down his hat, and pulled up his collar, to defend himself from the weather, that she could only see his chin, and even across that he drew the wet sleeve of his

shaggy coat, as she looked at him - Mrs Lupin set him down for a good-natured fellow, too.

'A bad night!' observed the hostess cheerfully.

The traveller shook himself like a Newfoundland dog, and said it was, rather.

'There's a fire in the kitchen,' said Mrs Lupin, 'and very good company there. Hadn't you better go and dry yourself?'

'No, thankee,' said the man, glancing towards the kitchen as he spoke; he seemed to know the way.

'It's enough to give you your death of cold,' observed the hostess.

'I don't take my death easy,' returned the traveller; 'or I should most likely have took it afore to-night. Your health, ma'am!'

Mrs Lupin thanked him; but in the act of lifting the tankard to his mouth, he changed his mind, and put it down again. Throwing his body back, and looking about him stiffly, as a man does who is wrapped up, and has his hat low down over his eyes, he said:

'What do you call this house? Not the Dragon, do you?'

Mrs Lupin complacently made answer, 'Yes, the Dragon.'

'Why, then, you've got a sort of a relation of mine here, ma'am,' said the traveller; 'a young man of the name of Tapley. What! Mark, my boy!' apostrophizing the premises, 'have I come upon you at last, old buck!'

This was touching Mrs Lupin on a tender point. She turned to trim the candle on the chimney-piece, and said, with her back towards the traveller:

'Nobody should be made more welcome at the Dragon, master, than any one who brought me news of Mark. But it's many and many a long day and month since he left here and England. And whether he's alive or dead, poor fellow, Heaven above us only knows!'

She shook her head, and her voice trembled; her hand must have done so too, for the light required a deal of trimming.

'Where did he go, ma'am?' asked the traveller, in a gentler voice.

'He went,' said Mrs Lupin, with increased distress, 'to America. He was always tender-hearted and kind, and perhaps at this moment may be lying in prison under sentence of death, for taking pity on some miserable black, and helping the poor runaway creetur to escape. How could he ever go to America! Why didn't he go to some of those countries where the savages eat each other fairly, and give an equal chance to every one!'

Quite subdued by this time, Mrs Lupin sobbed, and was retiring to a chair to give her grief free vent, when the traveller caught her in his arms, and she uttered a glad cry of recognition.

'Yes, I will!' cried Mark, 'another - one more - twenty more! You didn't know me in that hat and coat? I thought you would have known me anywheres! Ten more!'

'So I should have known you, if I could have seen you; but I couldn't, and you spoke so gruff. I didn't think you could speak gruff to me, Mark, at first coming back.'

'Fifteen more!' said Mr Tapley. 'How handsome and how young you look! Six more! The last half-dozen warn't a fair one, and must be done over again. Lord bless you, what a treat it is to see you! One more! Well, I never was so jolly. Just a few more, on account of there not being any credit in it!'

When Mr Tapley stopped in these calculations in simple addition, he did it, not because he was at all tired of the exercise, but because he was out of breath. The pause reminded him of other duties.

'Mr Martin Chuzzlewit's outside,' he said. 'I left him under the cartshed, while I came on to see if there was anybody here. We want to keep quiet to-night, till we know the news from you, and what it's best for us to do.'

'There's not a soul in the house, except the kitchen company,' returned the hostess. 'If they were to know you had come back, Mark, they'd have a bonfire in the street, late as it is.'

'But they mustn't know it to-night, my precious soul,' said Mark; 'so have the house shut, and the kitchen fire made up; and when it's all ready, put a light in the winder, and we'll come in. One more! I long to hear about old friends. You'll tell me all about 'em, won't you; Mr Pinch, and the butcher's dog down the street, and the terrier over the way, and the wheelwright's, and every one of 'em. When I first caught sight of the church to-night, I thought the steeple would have choked me, I did. One more! Won't you? Not a very little one to finish off with?'

'You have had plenty, I am sure,' said the hostess. 'Go along with your foreign manners!'

'That ain't foreign, bless you!' cried Mark. 'Native as oysters, that is! One more, because it's native! As a mark of respect for the land we live in! This don't count as between you and me, you understand,' said Mr Tapley. 'I ain't a-kissing you now, you'll observe. I have been among the patriots; I'm a-kissin' my country.'

It would have been very unreasonable to complain of the exhibition of his patriotism with which he followed up this explanation, that it was at all lukewarm or indifferent. When he had given full expression to his nationality, he hurried off to Martin; while Mrs Lupin, in a state of great agitation and excitement, prepared for their reception.

The company soon came tumbling out; insisting to each other that the Dragon clock was half an hour too fast, and that the thunder must have affected it. Impatient, wet, and weary though they were, Martin and Mark were overjoyed to see these old faces, and watched them with delighted interest as they departed from the house, and passed close by them.

'There's the old tailor, Mark!' whispered Martin.

'There he goes, sir! A little bandier than he was, I think, sir, ain't he? His figure's so far altered, as it seems to me, that you might wheel a rather larger barrow between his legs as he walks, than you could have done conveniently when we know'd him. There's Sam a-coming out, sir.'

'Ah, to be sure!' cried Martin; 'Sam, the hostler. I wonder whether that horse of Pecksniff's is alive still?'

'Not a doubt on it, sir,' returned Mark. 'That's a description of animal, sir, as will go on in a bony way peculiar to himself for a long time, and get into the newspapers at last under the title of 'Sing'lar Tenacity of Life in a Quadruped.' As if he had ever been alive in all his life, worth mentioning! There's the clerk, sir - wery drunk, as usual.'

'I see him!' said Martin, laughing. 'But, my life, how wet you are, Mark!'

'I am! What do you consider yourself, sir?'

'Oh, not half as bad,' said his fellow-traveller, with an air of great vexation. 'I told you not to keep on the windy side, Mark, but to let us change and change about. The rain has been beating on you ever since it began.'

'You don't know how it pleases me, sir,' said Mark, after a short silence, 'if I may make so bold as say so, to hear you a-going on in that there uncommon considerate way of yours; which I don't mean to attend to, never, but which, ever since that time when I was floored in Eden, you have showed.'

'Ah, Mark!' sighed Martin, 'the less we say of that the better. Do I see the light yonder?'

'That's the light!' cried Mark. 'Lord bless her, what briskness she possesses! Now for it, sir. Neat wines, good beds, and first-rate entertainment for man or beast.'

The kitchen fire burnt clear and red, the table was spread out, the kettle boiled; the slippers were there, the boot-jack too, sheets of ham were there, cooking on the gridiron; half-a-dozen eggs were there, poaching in the frying-pan; a plethoric cherry-brandy bottle was there, winking at a foaming jug of beer upon the table; rare provisions were there, dangling from the rafters as if you had only to open your mouth, and something exquisitely ripe and good would be glad of the excuse for tumbling into it. Mrs Lupin, who for their sakes had dislodged the very cook, high priestess of the temple, with her own genial hands was dressing their repast.

It was impossible to help it - a ghost must have hugged her. The Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea being, in that respect, all one, Martin hugged her instantly. Mr Tapley (as if the idea were quite novel, and had never occurred to him before), followed, with much gravity, on the same side.

'Little did I ever think,' said Mrs Lupin, adjusting her cap and laughing heartily; yes, and blushing too; 'often as I have said that Mr Pecksniff's young gentlemen were the life and soul of the Dragon, and that without them it would be too dull to live in - little did I ever think I am sure, that any one of them would ever make so free as you, Mr Martin! And still less that I shouldn't be angry with him, but should be glad with all my heart to be the first to welcome him home from America, with Mark Tapley for his - '

'For his friend, Mrs Lupin,' interposed Martin.

'For his friend,' said the hostess, evidently gratified by this distinction, but at the same time admonishing Mr Tapley with a fork to remain at a respectful distance. 'Little did I ever think that! But still less, that I should ever have the changes to relate that I shall have to tell you of, when you have done your supper!'

'Good Heaven!' cried Martin, changing colour, 'what changes?'

'SHE,' said the hostess, 'is quite well, and now at Mr Pecksniff's. Don't be at all alarmed about her. She is everything you could wish. It's of no use mincing matters, or making secrets, is it?' added Mrs Lupin. 'I know all about it, you see!'

'My good creature,' returned Martin, 'you are exactly the person who ought to know all about it. I am delighted to think you DO know about that! But what changes do you hint at? Has any death occurred?'

'No, no!' said the hostess. 'Not as bad as that. But I declare now that I will not be drawn into saying another word till you have had your supper. If you ask me fifty questions in the meantime, I won't answer one.'

She was so positive, that there was nothing for it but to get the supper over as quickly as possible; and as they had been walking a great many miles, and had fasted since the middle of the day, they did no great violence to their own inclinations in falling on it tooth and nail. It took rather longer to get through than might have been expected; for, half-a-dozen times, when they thought they had finished, Mrs Lupin exposed the fallacy of that impression triumphantly. But at last, in the course of time and nature, they gave in. Then, sitting with their slippers stretched out upon the kitchen hearth (which was wonderfully comforting, for the night had grown by this time raw and chilly), and looking with involuntary admiration at their dimpled, buxom, blooming hostess, as the firelight sparkled in her eyes and glimmered in her raven hair, they composed themselves to listen to her news.

Many were the exclamations of surprise which interrupted her, when she told them of the separation between Mr Pecksniff and his daughters, and between the same good gentleman and Mr Pinch. But these were nothing to the indignant demonstrations of Martin, when she related, as the common talk of the neighbourhood, what entire possession he had obtained over the mind and person of old Mr Chuzzlewit, and what high honour he designed for Mary. On receipt of this intelligence, Martin's slippers flew off in a twinkling, and he began pulling on his wet boots with that indefinite intention of going somewhere instantly, and doing something to somebody, which is the first safety-valve of a hot temper.

'He!' said Martin, 'smooth-tongued villain that he is! He! Give me that other boot, Mark?'

'Where was you a-thinking of going to, sir?' inquired Mr Tapley drying the sole at the fire, and looking coolly at it as he spoke, as if it were a slice of toast.

'Where!' repeated Martin. 'You don't suppose I am going to remain here, do you?'

The imperturbable Mark confessed that he did.

You do!' retorted Martin angrily. 'I am much obliged to you. What do you take me for?'

'I take you for what you are, sir,' said Mark; 'and, consequently, am quite sure that whatever you do will be right and sensible. The boot, sir.'

Martin darted an impatient look at him, without taking it, and walked rapidly up and down the kitchen several times, with one boot and a stocking on. But, mindful of his Eden resolution, he had already gained many victories over himself when Mark was in the case, and he resolved to conquer now. So he came back to the book-jack, laid his hand on Mark's shoulder to steady himself, pulled the boot off, picked up his slippers, put them on, and sat down again. He could not help thrusting his hands to the very bottom of his pockets, and muttering at intervals, 'Pecksniff too! That fellow! Upon my soul! In-deed! What next?' and so forth; nor could he help occasionally shaking his fist at the chimney, with a very threatening countenance; but this did not last long; and he heard Mrs Lupin out, if not with composure, at all events in silence.

'As to Mr Pecksniff himself,' observed the hostess in conclusion, spreading out the skirts of her gown with both hands, and nodding her head a great many times as she did so, 'I don't know what to say. Somebody must have poisoned his mind, or influenced him in some extraordinary way. I cannot believe that such a noble-spoken gentleman would go and do wrong of his own accord!'

A noble-spoken gentleman! How many people are there in the world, who, for no better reason, uphold their Pecksniffs to the last and abandon virtuous men, when Pecksniffs breathe upon them!

'As to Mr Pinch,' pursued the landlady, 'if ever there was a dear, good, pleasant, worthy soul alive, Pinch, and no other, is his name. But how do we know that old Mr Chuzzlewit himself was not the cause of difference arising between him and Mr Pecksniff? No one but themselves can tell; for Mr Pinch has a proud spirit, though he has such a quiet way; and when he left us, and was so sorry to go, he scorned to make his story good, even to me.'

'Poor old Tom!' said Martin, in a tone that sounded like remorse.

'It's a comfort to know,' resumed the landlady, 'that he has his sister living with him, and is doing well. Only yesterday he sent me back, by post, a little' - here the colour came into her cheeks - 'a little trifle I was bold enough to lend him when he went away; saying, with many thanks, that he had good employment, and didn't want it. It was the same note; he hadn't broken it. I never thought I could have been so little pleased to see a bank-note come back to me as I was to see that.'

'Kindly said, and heartily!' said Martin. 'Is it not, Mark?'

'She can't say anything as does not possess them qualities,' returned Mr Tapley; 'which as much belongs to the Dragon as its licence. And now that we have got quite cool and fresh, to the subject again, sir; what will you do? If you're not proud, and can make up your mind to go through with what you spoke of, coming along, that's the course for you to take. If you started wrong with your grandfather (which, you'll excuse my taking the liberty of saying, appears to have been the case), up with you, sir, and tell him so, and make an appeal to his affections. Don't stand out. He's a great deal older than you, and if he was hasty, you was hasty too. Give way, sir, give way.'

The eloquence of Mr Tapley was not without its effect on Martin but he still hesitated, and expressed his reason thus:

'That's all very true, and perfectly correct, Mark; and if it were a mere question of humbling myself before HIM, I would not consider it twice. But don't you see, that being wholly under this hypocrite's government, and having (if what we hear be true) no mind or will of his own, I throw myself, in fact, not at his feet, but at the feet of Mr Pecksniff? And when I am rejected and spurned away,' said Martin, turning crimson at the thought, 'it is not by him; my own blood stirred against me; but by Pecksniff - Pecksniff, Mark!'

'Well, but we know beforehand,' returned the politic Mr Tapley, 'that Pecksniff is a wagabond, a scoundrel, and a willain.'

'A most pernicious villain!' said Martin.

'A most pernicious willain. We know that beforehand, sir; and, consequently, it's no shame to be defeated by Pecksniff. Blow Pecksniff!' cried Mr Tapley, in the fervour of his eloquence. 'Who's he! It's not in the nature of Pecksniff to shame US, unless he agreed with us, or done us a service; and, in case he offered any audacity of that description, we could express our sentiments in the English language, I hope. Pecksniff!' repeated Mr Tapley, with ineffable disdain. 'What's Pecksniff, who's Pecksniff, where's Pecksniff, that he's to be so much considered? We're not a-calculating for ourselves;' he laid uncommon emphasis on the last syllable of that word, and looked full in Martin's

face; 'we're making a effort for a young lady likewise as has undergone her share; and whatever little hope we have, this here Pecksniff is not to stand in its way, I expect. I never heard of any act of Parliament, as was made by Pecksniff. Pecksniff! Why, I wouldn't see the man myself; I wouldn't hear him; I wouldn't choose to know he was in company. I'd scrape my shoes on the scraper of the door, and call that Pecksniff, if you liked; but I wouldn't condescend no further.'

The amazement of Mrs Lupin, and indeed of Mr Tapley himself for that matter, at this impassioned flow of language, was immense. But Martin, after looking thoughtfully at the fire for a short time, said:

'You are right, Mark. Right or wrong, it shall be done. I'll do it.'

'One word more, sir,' returned Mark. 'Only think of him so far as not to give him a handle against you. Don't you do anything secret that he can report before you get there. Don't you even see Miss Mary in the morning, but let this here dear friend of ours' - Mr Tapley bestowed a smile upon the hostess - 'prepare her for what's a-going to happen, and carry any little message as may be agreeable. She knows how. Don't you?' Mrs Lupin laughed and tossed her head. 'Then you go in, bold and free as a gentleman should. 'I haven't done nothing underhanded,' says you. 'I haven't been skulking about the premises, here I am, for-give me, I ask your pardon, God Bless You!'

Martin smiled, but felt that it was good advice notwithstanding, and resolved to act upon it. When they had ascertained from Mrs Lupin that Pecksniff had already returned from the great ceremonial at which they had beheld him in his glory; and when they had fully arranged the order of their proceedings; they went to bed, intent upon the morrow.

In pursuance of their project as agreed upon at this discussion, Mr Tapley issued forth next morning, after breakfast, charged with a letter from Martin to his grandfather, requesting leave to wait upon him for a few minutes. And postponing as he went along the congratulations of his numerous friends until a more convenient season, he soon arrived at Mr Pecksniff's house. At that gentleman's door; with a face so immovable that it would have been next to an impossibility for the most acute physiognomist to determine what he was thinking about, or whether he was thinking at all; he straightway knocked.

A person of Mr Tapley's observation could not long remain insensible to the fact that Mr Pecksniff was making the end of his nose very blunt against the glass of the parlour window, in an angular attempt to discover who had knocked at the door. Nor was Mr Tapley slow to baffle this movement on the part of the enemy, by perching himself on

the top step, and presenting the crown of his hat in that direction. But possibly Mr Pecksniff had already seen him, for Mark soon heard his shoes creaking, as he advanced to open the door with his own hands.

Mr Pecksniff was as cheerful as ever, and sang a little song in the passage.

'How d'ye do, sir?' said Mark.

'Oh!' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'Tapley, I believe? The Prodigal returned! We don't want any beer, my friend.'

'Thankee, sir,' said Mark. 'I couldn't accommodate you if you did. A letter, sir. Wait for an answer.'

'For me?' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'And an answer, eh?'

'Not for you, I think, sir,' said Mark, pointing out the direction. 'Chuzzlewit, I believe the name is, sir.'

'Oh!' returned Mr Pecksniff. 'Thank you. Yes. Who's it from, my good young man?'

'The gentleman it comes from wrote his name inside, sir,' returned Mr Tapley with extreme politeness. 'I see him a-signing of it at the end, while I was a-waitin'.'

'And he said he wanted an answer, did he?' asked Mr Pecksniff in his most persuasive manner.

Mark replied in the affirmative.

'He shall have an answer. Certainly,' said Mr Pecksniff, tearing the letter into small pieces, as mildly as if that were the most flattering attention a correspondent could receive. 'Have the goodness to give him that, with my compliments, if you please. Good morning!' Whereupon he handed Mark the scraps; retired, and shut the door.

Mark thought it prudent to subdue his personal emotions, and return to Martin at the Dragon. They were not unprepared for such a reception, and suffered an hour or so to elapse before making another attempt. When this interval had gone by, they returned to Mr Pecksniff's house in company. Martin knocked this time, while Mr Tapley prepared himself to keep the door open with his foot and shoulder, when anybody came, and by that means secure an enforced parley. But this precaution was needless, for the servant-girl appeared almost immediately. Brushing quickly past her as he had resolved in such a case to do, Martin (closely followed by his faithful ally) opened

the door of that parlour in which he knew a visitor was most likely to be found; passed at once into the room; and stood, without a word of notice or announcement, in the presence of his grandfather.

Mr Pecksniff also was in the room; and Mary. In the swift instant of their mutual recognition, Martin saw the old man droop his grey head, and hide his face in his hands.

It smote him to the heart. In his most selfish and most careless day, this lingering remnant of the old man's ancient love, this buttress of a ruined tower he had built up in the time gone by, with so much pride and hope, would have caused a pang in Martin's heart. But now, changed for the better in his worst respect; looking through an altered medium on his former friend, the guardian of his childhood, so broken and bowed down; resentment, sullenness, self-confidence, and pride, were all swept away, before the starting tears upon the withered cheeks. He could not bear to see them. He could not bear to think they fell at sight of him. He could not bear to view reflected in them, the reproachful and irrevocable Past.

He hurriedly advanced to seize the old man's hand in his, when Mr Pecksniff interposed himself between them.

'No, young man!' said Mr Pecksniff, striking himself upon the breast, and stretching out his other arm towards his guest as if it were a wing to shelter him. 'No, sir. None of that. Strike here, sir, here! Launch your arrows at me, sir, if you'll have the goodness; not at Him!'

'Grandfather!' cried Martin. 'Hear me! I implore you, let me speak!'

'Would you, sir? Would you?' said Mr Pecksniff, dodging about, so as to keep himself always between them. 'Is it not enough, sir, that you come into my house like a thief in the night, or I should rather say, for we can never be too particular on the subject of Truth, like a thief in the day-time; bringing your dissolute companions with you, to plant themselves with their backs against the insides of parlour doors, and prevent the entrance or issuing forth of any of my household' - Mark had taken up this position, and held it quite unmoved - 'but would you also strike at venerable Virtue? Would you? Know that it is not defenceless. I will be its shield, young man. Assail me. Come on, sir. Fire away!'

'Pecksniff,' said the old man, in a feeble voice. 'Calm yourself. Be quiet.'

'I can't be calm,' cried Mr Pecksniff, 'and I won't be quiet. My benefactor and my friend! Shall even my house be no refuge for your hoary pillow!'

'Stand aside!' said the old man, stretching out his hand; 'and let me see what it is I used to love so dearly.'

'It is right that you should see it, my friend,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'It is well that you should see it, my noble sir. It is desirable that you should contemplate it in its true proportions. Behold it! There it is, sir. There it is!'

Martin could hardly be a mortal man, and not express in his face something of the anger and disdain with which Mr Pecksniff inspired him. But beyond this he evinced no knowledge whatever of that gentleman's presence or existence. True, he had once, and that at first, glanced at him involuntarily, and with supreme contempt; but for any other heed he took of him, there might have been nothing in his place save empty air.

As Mr Pecksniff withdrew from between them, agreeably to the wish just now expressed (which he did during the delivery of the observations last recorded), old Martin, who had taken Mary Graham's hand in his, and whispered kindly to her, as telling her she had no cause to be alarmed, gently pushed her from him, behind his chair; and looked steadily at his grandson.

'And that,' he said, 'is he. Ah! that is he! Say what you wish to say. But come no nearer.'

'His sense of justice is so fine,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'that he will hear even him, although he knows beforehand that nothing can come of it. Ingenuous mind!' Mr Pecksniff did not address himself immediately to any person in saying this, but assuming the position of the Chorus in a Greek Tragedy, delivered his opinion as a commentary on the proceedings.

'Grandfather!' said Martin, with great earnestness. 'From a painful journey, from a hard life, from a sick-bed, from privation and distress, from gloom and disappointment, from almost hopelessness and despair, I have come back to you.'

'Rovers of this sort,' observed Mr Pecksniff, as Chorus, 'very commonly come back when they find they don't meet with the success they expected in their marauding ravages.'

'But for this faithful man,' said Martin, turning towards Mark, 'whom I first knew in this place, and who went away with me voluntarily, as a servant, but has been, throughout, my zealous and devoted friend; but for him, I must have died abroad. Far from home, far from any help or consolation; far from the probability even of my wretched fate

being ever known to any one who cared to hear it - oh, that you would let me say, of being known to you!

The old man looked at Mr Pecksniff. Mr Pecksniff looked at him. 'Did you speak, my worthy sir?' said Mr Pecksniff, with a smile. The old man answered in the negative. 'I know what you thought,' said Mr Pecksniff, with another smile. 'Let him go on my friend. The development of self-interest in the human mind is always a curious study. Let him go on, sir.'

'Go on!' observed the old man; in a mechanical obedience, it appeared, to Mr Pecksniff's suggestion.

'I have been so wretched and so poor,' said Martin, 'that I am indebted to the charitable help of a stranger, in a land of strangers, for the means of returning here. All this tells against me in your mind, I know. I have given you cause to think I have been driven here wholly by want, and have not been led on, in any degree, by affection or regret. When I parted from you, Grandfather, I deserved that suspicion, but I do not now. I do not now.'

The Chorus put its hand in its waistcoat, and smiled. 'Let him go on, my worthy sir,' it said. 'I know what you are thinking of, but don't express it prematurely.'

Old Martin raised his eyes to Mr Pecksniff's face, and appearing to derive renewed instruction from his looks and words, said, once again:

'Go on!'

'I have little more to say,' returned Martin. 'And as I say it now, with little or no hope, Grandfather; whatever dawn of hope I had on entering the room; believe it to be true. At least, believe it to be true.'

'Beautiful Truth!' exclaimed the Chorus, looking upward. 'How is your name profaned by vicious persons! You don't live in a well, my holy principle, but on the lips of false mankind. It is hard to bear with mankind, dear sir' - addressing the elder Mr Chuzzlewit; 'but let us do so meekly. It is our duty so to do. Let us be among the Few who do their duty. If,' pursued the Chorus, soaring up into a lofty flight, 'as the poet informs us, England expects Every man to do his duty, England is the most sanguine country on the face of the earth, and will find itself continually disappointed.'

'Upon that subject,' said Martin, looking calmly at the old man as he spoke, but glancing once at Mary, whose face was now buried in her hands, upon the back of his easy-chair; 'upon that subject which first occasioned a division between us, my mind and heart are incapable of

change. Whatever influence they have undergone, since that unhappy time, has not been one to weaken but to strengthen me. I cannot profess sorrow for that, nor irresolution in that, nor shame in that. Nor would you wish me, I know. But that I might have trusted to your love, if I had thrown myself manfully upon it; that I might have won you over with ease, if I had been more yielding and more considerate; that I should have best remembered myself in forgetting myself, and recollecting you; reflection, solitude, and misery, have taught me. I came resolved to say this, and to ask your forgiveness; not so much in hope for the future, as in regret for the past; for all that I would ask of you is, that you would aid me to live. Help me to get honest work to do, and I would do it. My condition places me at the disadvantage of seeming to have only my selfish ends to serve, but try if that be so or not. Try if I be self-willed, obdurate, and haughty, as I was; or have been disciplined in a rough school. Let the voice of nature and association plead between us, Grandfather; and do not, for one fault, however thankless, quite reject me!

As he ceased, the grey head of the old man drooped again; and he concealed his face behind his outspread fingers.

'My dear sir,' cried Mr Pecksniff, bending over him, 'you must not give way to this. It is very natural, and very amiable, but you must not allow the shameless conduct of one whom you long ago cast off, to move you so far. Rouse yourself. Think,' said Pecksniff, 'think of Me, my friend.'

'I will,' returned old Martin, looking up into his face. 'You recall me to myself. I will.'

'Why, what,' said Mr Pecksniff, sitting down beside him in a chair which he drew up for the purpose, and tapping him playfully on the arm, 'what is the matter with my strong-minded compatriot, if I may venture to take the liberty of calling him by that endearing expression? Shall I have to scold my coadjutor, or to reason with an intellect like this? I think not.'

'No, no. There is no occasion,' said the old man. 'A momentary feeling. Nothing more.'

'Indignation,' observed Mr Pecksniff, 'WILL bring the scalding tear into the honest eye, I know' - he wiped his own elaborately. 'But we have highest duties to perform than that. Rouse yourself, Mr Chuzzlewit. Shall I give expression to your thoughts, my friend?'

'Yes,' said old Martin, leaning back in his chair, and looking at him, half in vacancy and half in admiration, as if he were fascinated by the

man. 'Speak for me, Pecksniff, Thank you. You are true to me. Thank you!'

'Do not unman me, sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, shaking his hand vigorously, 'or I shall be unequal to the task. It is not agreeable to my feelings, my good sir, to address the person who is now before us, for when I ejected him from this house, after hearing of his unnatural conduct from your lips, I renounced communication with him for ever. But you desire it; and that is sufficient. Young man! The door is immediately behind the companion of your infamy. Blush if you can; begone without a blush, if you can't.'

Martin looked as steadily at his grandfather as if there had been a dead silence all this time. The old man looked no less steadily at Mr Pecksniff.

'When I ordered you to leave this house upon the last occasion of your being dismissed from it with disgrace,' said Mr Pecksniff; 'when, stung and stimulated beyond endurance by your shameless conduct to this extraordinarily noble-minded individual, I exclaimed 'Go forth!' I told you that I wept for your depravity. Do not suppose that the tear which stands in my eye at this moment, is shed for you. It is shed for him, sir. It is shed for him.'

Here Mr Pecksniff, accidentally dropping the tear in question on a bald part of Mr Chuzzlewit's head, wiped the place with his pocket-handkerchief, and begged pardon.

'It is shed for him, sir, whom you seek to make the victim of your arts,' said Mr Pecksniff; 'whom you seek to plunder, to deceive, and to mislead. It is shed in sympathy with him, and admiration of him; not in pity for him, for happily he knows what you are. You shall not wrong him further, sir, in any way,' said Mr Pecksniff, quite transported with enthusiasm, 'while I have life. You may bestride my senseless corse, sir. That is very likely. I can imagine a mind like yours deriving great satisfaction from any measure of that kind. But while I continue to be called upon to exist, sir, you must strike at him through me. Awe!' said Mr Pecksniff, shaking his head at Martin with indignant jocularly; 'and in such a cause you will find me, my young sir, an Ugly Customer!'

Still Martin looked steadily and mildly at his grandfather. 'Will you give me no answer,' he said, at length, 'not a word?'

'You hear what has been said,' replied the old man, without averting his eyes from the face of Mr Pecksniff; who nodded encouragingly.

'I have not heard your voice. I have not heard your spirit,' returned Martin.

'Tell him again,' said the old man, still gazing up in Mr Pecksniff's face.

'I only hear,' replied Martin, strong in his purpose from the first, and stronger in it as he felt how Pecksniff winced and shrunk beneath his contempt; 'I only hear what you say to me, grandfather.'

Perhaps it was well for Mr Pecksniff that his venerable friend found in his (Mr Pecksniff's) features an exclusive and engrossing object of contemplation, for if his eyes had gone astray, and he had compared young Martin's bearing with that of his zealous defender, the latter disinterested gentleman would scarcely have shown to greater advantage than on the memorable afternoon when he took Tom Pinch's last receipt in full of all demands. One really might have thought there was some quality in Mr Pecksniff - an emanation from the brightness and purity within him perhaps - which set off and adorned his foes; they looked so gallant and so manly beside him.

'Not a word?' said Martin, for the second time.

'I remember that I have a word to say, Pecksniff,' observed the old man. 'But a word. You spoke of being indebted to the charitable help of some stranger for the means of returning to England. Who is he? And what help in money did he render you?'

Although he asked this question of Martin, he did not look towards him, but kept his eyes on Mr Pecksniff as before. It appeared to have become a habit with him, both in a literal and figurative sense, to look to Mr Pecksniff alone.

Martin took out his pencil, tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and hastily wrote down the particulars of his debt to Mr Bevan. The old man stretched out his hand for the paper, and took it; but his eyes did not wander from Mr Pecksniff's face.

'It would be a poor pride and a false humility,' said Martin, in a low voice, 'to say, I do not wish that to be paid, or that I have any present hope of being able to pay it. But I never felt my poverty so deeply as I feel it now.'

'Read it to me, Pecksniff,' said the old man.

Mr Pecksniff, after approaching the perusal of the paper as if it were a manuscript confession of a murder, complied.

'I think, Pecksniff,' said old Martin, 'I could wish that to be discharged. I should not like the lender, who was abroad, who had no opportunity of making inquiry, and who did (as he thought) a kind action, to suffer.'

'An honourable sentiment, my dear sir. Your own entirely. But a dangerous precedent,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'permit me to suggest.'

'It shall not be a precedent,' returned the old man. 'It is the only recognition of him. But we will talk of it again. You shall advise me. There is nothing else?'

'Nothing else,' said Mr Pecksniff buoyantly, 'but for you to recover this intrusion - this cowardly and indefensible outrage on your feelings - with all possible dispatch, and smile again.'

'You have nothing more to say?' inquired the old man, laying his hand with unusual earnestness on Mr Pecksniff's sleeve.

Mr Pecksniff would not say what rose to his lips. For reproaches he observed, were useless.

'You have nothing at all to urge? You are sure of that! If you have, no matter what it is, speak freely. I will oppose nothing that you ask of me,' said the old man.

The tears rose in such abundance to Mr Pecksniff's eyes at this proof of unlimited confidence on the part of his friend, that he was fain to clasp the bridge of his nose convulsively before he could at all compose himself. When he had the power of utterance again, he said with great emotion, that he hoped he should live to deserve this; and added, that he had no other observation whatever to make.

For a few moments the old man sat looking at him, with that blank and motionless expression which is not uncommon in the faces of those whose faculties are on the wane, in age. But he rose up firmly too, and walked towards the door, from which Mark withdrew to make way for him.

The obsequious Mr Pecksniff proffered his arm. The old man took it. Turning at the door, he said to Martin, waving him off with his hand,

'You have heard him. Go away. It is all over. Go!'

Mr Pecksniff murmured certain cheering expressions of sympathy and encouragement as they retired; and Martin, awakening from the stupor into which the closing portion of this scene had plunged him,

to the opportunity afforded by their departure, caught the innocent cause of all in his embrace, and pressed her to his heart.

'Dear girl!' said Martin. 'He has not changed you. Why, what an impotent and harmless knave the fellow is!'

'You have restrained yourself so nobly! You have borne so much!'

'Restrained myself!' cried Martin, cheerfully. 'You were by, and were unchanged, I knew. What more advantage did I want? The sight of me was such a bitterness to the dog, that I had my triumph in his being forced to endure it. But tell me, love - for the few hasty words we can exchange now are precious - what is this which has been rumoured to me? Is it true that you are persecuted by this knave's addresses?'

'I was, dear Martin, and to some extent am now; but my chief source of unhappiness has been anxiety for you. Why did you leave us in such terrible suspense?'

'Sickness, distance; the dread of hinting at our real condition, the impossibility of concealing it except in perfect silence; the knowledge that the truth would have pained you infinitely more than uncertainty and doubt,' said Martin, hurriedly; as indeed everything else was done and said, in those few hurried moments, 'were the causes of my writing only once. But Pecksniff? You needn't fear to tell me the whole tale; for you saw me with him face to face, hearing him speak, and not taking him by the throat; what is the history of his pursuit of you? Is it known to my grandfather?'

'Yes.'

'And he assists him in it?'

'No,' she answered eagerly.

'Thank Heaven!' cried Martin, 'that it leaves his mind unclouded in that one respect!'

'I do not think,' said Mary, 'it was known to him at first. When this man had sufficiently prepared his mind, he revealed it to him by degrees. I think so, but I only know it from my own impression: now from anything they told me. Then he spoke to me alone.'

'My grandfather did?' said Martin.

'Yes - spoke to me alone, and told me - '

'What the hound had said,' cried Martin. 'Don't repeat it.'

'And said I knew well what qualities he possessed; that he was moderately rich; in good repute; and high in his favour and confidence. But seeing me very much distressed, he said that he would not control or force my inclinations, but would content himself with telling me the fact. He would not pain me by dwelling on it, or reverting to it; nor has he ever done so since, but has truly kept his word.'

'The man himself? - ' asked Martin.

'He has had few opportunities of pursuing his suit. I have never walked out alone, or remained alone an instant in his presence. Dear Martin, I must tell you,' she continued, 'that the kindness of your grandfather to me remains unchanged. I am his companion still. An indescribable tenderness and compassion seem to have mingled themselves with his old regard; and if I were his only child, I could not have a gentler father. What former fancy or old habit survives in this, when his heart has turned so cold to you, is a mystery I cannot penetrate; but it has been, and it is, a happiness to me, that I remained true to him; that if he should wake from his delusion, even at the point of death, I am here, love, to recall you to his thoughts.'

Martin looked with admiration on her glowing face, and pressed his lips to hers.

'I have sometimes heard, and read,' she said, 'that those whose powers had been enfeebled long ago, and whose lives had faded, as it were, into a dream, have been known to rouse themselves before death, and inquire for familiar faces once very dear to them; but forgotten, unrecognized, hated even, in the meantime. Think, if with his old impressions of this man, he should suddenly resume his former self, and find in him his only friend!'

'I would not urge you to abandon him, dearest,' said Martin, 'though I could count the years we are to wear out asunder. But the influence this fellow exercises over him has steadily increased, I fear.'

She could not help admitting that. Steadily, imperceptibly, and surely, until it was paramount and supreme. She herself had none; and yet he treated her with more affection than at any previous time. Martin thought the inconsistency a part of his weakness and decay.

'Does the influence extend to fear?' said Martin. 'Is he timid of asserting his own opinion in the presence of this infatuation? I fancied so just now.'

'I have thought so, often. Often when we are sitting alone, almost as we used to do, and I have been reading a favourite book to him or he

has been talking quite cheerfully, I have observed that the entrance of Mr Pecksniff has changed his whole demeanour. He has broken off immediately, and become what you have seen to-day. When we first came here he had his impetuous outbreaks, in which it was not easy for Mr Pecksniff with his utmost plausibility to appease him. But these have long since dwindled away. He defers to him in everything, and has no opinion upon any question, but that which is forced upon him by this treacherous man.'

Such was the account, rapidly furnished in whispers, and interrupted, brief as it was, by many false alarms of Mr Pecksniff's return; which Martin received of his grandfather's decline, and of that good gentleman's ascendancy. He heard of Tom Pinch too, and Jonas too, with not a little about himself into the bargain; for though lovers are remarkable for leaving a great deal unsaid on all occasions, and very properly desiring to come back and say it, they are remarkable also for a wonderful power of condensation, and can, in one way or other, give utterance to more language - eloquent language - in any given short space of time, than all the six hundred and fifty-eight members in the Commons House of Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland; who are strong lovers no doubt, but of their country only, which makes all the difference; for in a passion of that kind (which is not always returned), it is the custom to use as many words as possible, and express nothing whatever.

A caution from Mr Tapley; a hasty interchange of farewells, and of something else which the proverb says must not be told of afterwards; a white hand held out to Mr Tapley himself, which he kissed with the devotion of a knight-errant; more farewells, more something else's; a parting word from Martin that he would write from London and would do great things there yet (Heaven knows what, but he quite believed it); and Mark and he stood on the outside of the Pecksniffian halls.

'A short interview after such an absence!' said Martin, sorrowfully. 'But we are well out of the house. We might have placed ourselves in a false position by remaining there, even so long, Mark.'

'I don't know about ourselves, sir,' he returned; 'but somebody else would have got into a false position, if he had happened to come back again, while we was there. I had the door all ready, sir. If Pecksniff had showed his head, or had only so much as listened behind it, I would have caught him like a walnut. He's the sort of man,' added Mr Tapley, musing, 'as would squeeze soft, I know.'

A person who was evidently going to Mr Pecksniff's house, passed them at this moment. He raised his eyes at the mention of the architect's name; and when he had gone on a few yards, stopped and gazed at them. Mr Tapley, also, looked over his shoulder, and so did

Martin; for the stranger, as he passed, had looked very sharply at them.

'Who may that be, I wonder!' said Martin. 'The face seems familiar to me, but I don't know the man.'

'He seems to have a amiable desire that his face should be tolerable familiar to us,' said Mr Tapley, 'for he's a-staring pretty hard. He'd better not waste his beauty, for he ain't got much to spare.'

Coming in sight of the Dragon, they saw a travelling carriage at the door.

'And a Salisbury carriage, eh?' said Mr Tapley. 'That's what he came in depend upon it. What's in the wind now? A new pupil, I shouldn't wonder. P'raps it's a order for another grammar-school, of the same pattern as the last.'

Before they could enter at the door, Mrs Lupin came running out; and beckoning them to the carriage showed them a portmanteau with the name of CHUZZLEWIT upon it.

'Miss Pecksniff's husband that was,' said the good woman to Martin. 'I didn't know what terms you might be on, and was quite in a worry till you came back.'

'He and I have never interchanged a word yet,' observed Martin; 'and as I have no wish to be better or worse acquainted with him, I will not put myself in his way. We passed him on the road, I have no doubt. I am glad he timed his coming as he did. Upon my word! Miss Pecksniff's husband travels gayly!'

'A very fine-looking gentleman with him - in the best room now,' whispered Mrs Lupin, glancing up at the window as they went into the house. 'He has ordered everything that can be got for dinner; and has the glossiest moustaches and whiskers ever you saw.'

'Has he?' cried Martin, 'why then we'll endeavour to avoid him too, in the hope that our self-denial may be strong enough for the sacrifice. It is only for a few hours,' said Martin, dropping wearily into a chair behind the little screen in the bar. 'Our visit has met with no success, my dear Mrs Lupin, and I must go to London.'

'Dear, dear!' cried the hostess.

'Yes, one foul wind no more makes a winter, than one swallow makes a summer. I'll try it again. Tom Pinch has succeeded. With his advice to guide me, I may do the same. I took Tom under my protection once,

God save the mark!' said Martin, with a melancholy smile; 'and promised I would make his fortune. Perhaps Tom will take me under HIS protection now, and teach me how to earn my bread.'