

Chapter XLIV

Further Continuation Of The Enterprise Of Mr Jonas And His Friend

It was a special quality, among the many admirable qualities possessed by Mr Pecksniff, that the more he was found out, the more hypocrisy he practised. Let him be discomfited in one quarter, and he refreshed and recompensed himself by carrying the war into another. If his workings and windings were detected by A, so much the greater reason was there for practicing without loss of time on B, if it were only to keep his hand in. He had never been such a saintly and improving spectacle to all about him, as after his detection by Thomas Pinch. He had scarcely ever been at once so tender in his humanity, and so dignified and exalted in his virtue, as when young Martin's scorn was fresh and hot upon him.

Having this large stock of superfluous sentiment and morality on hand which must positively be cleared off at any sacrifice, Mr Pecksniff no sooner heard his son-in-law announced, than he regarded him as a kind of wholesale or general order, to be immediately executed. Descending, therefore, swiftly to the parlour, and clasping the young man in his arms, he exclaimed, with looks and gestures that denoted the perturbation of his spirit:

'Jonas. My child - she is well! There is nothing the matter?'

'What, you're at it again, are you?' replied his son-in-law. 'Even with me? Get away with you, will you?'

'Tell me she is well then,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Tell me she is well my boy!'

'She's well enough,' retorted Jonas, disengaging himself. 'There's nothing the matter with HER.'

'There is nothing the matter with her!' cried Mr Pecksniff, sitting down in the nearest chair, and rubbing up his hair. 'Fie upon my weakness! I cannot help it, Jonas. Thank you. I am better now. How is my other child; my eldest; my Cherrywerrychigo?' said Mr Pecksniff, inventing a playful little name for her, in the restored lightness of his heart.

'She's much about the same as usual,' returned Jonas. 'She sticks pretty close to the vinegar-bottle. You know she's got a sweetheart, I suppose?'

'I have heard of it,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'from headquarters; from my child herself I will not deny that it moved me to contemplate the loss

of my remaining daughter, Jonas - I am afraid we parents are selfish, I am afraid we are - but it has ever been the study of my life to qualify them for the domestic hearth; and it is a sphere which Cherry will adorn.'

'She need adorn some sphere or other,' observed the son-in-law, for she ain't very ornamental in general.'

'My girls are now provided for,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'They are now happily provided for, and I have not laboured in vain!'

This is exactly what Mr Pecksniff would have said, if one of his daughters had drawn a prize of thirty thousand pounds in the lottery, or if the other had picked up a valuable purse in the street, which nobody appeared to claim. In either of these cases he would have invoked a patriarchal blessing on the fortunate head, with great solemnity, and would have taken immense credit to himself, as having meant it from the infant's cradle.

'Suppose we talk about something else, now,' observed Jonas, drily. 'just for a change. Are you quite agreeable?'

'Quite,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Ah, you wag, you naughty wag! You laugh at poor old fond papa. Well! He deserves it. And he don't mind it either, for his feelings are their own reward. You have come to stay with me, Jonas?'

'No. I've got a friend with me,' said Jonas.

'Bring your friend!' cried Mr Pecksniff, in a gush of hospitality. 'Bring any number of your friends!'

'This ain't the sort of man to be brought,' said Jonas, contemptuously. 'I think I see myself 'bringing' him to your house, for a treat! Thank'ee all the same; but he's a little too near the top of the tree for that, Pecksniff.'

The good man pricked up his ears; his interest was awakened. A position near the top of the tree was greatness, virtue, goodness, sense, genius; or, it should rather be said, a dispensation from all, and in itself something immeasurably better than all; with Mr Pecksniff. A man who was able to look down upon Mr Pecksniff could not be looked up at, by that gentleman, with too great an amount of deference, or from a position of too much humility. So it always is with great spirits.

'I'll tell you what you may do, if you like,' said Jonas; 'you may come and dine with us at the Dragon. We were forced to come down to

Salisbury last night, on some business, and I got him to bring me over here this morning, in his carriage; at least, not his own carriage, for we had a breakdown in the night, but one we hired instead; it's all the same. Mind what you're about, you know. He's not used to all sorts; he only mixes with the best!

'Some young nobleman who has been borrowing money of you at good interest, eh?' said Mr Pecksniff, shaking his forefinger facetiously. 'I shall be delighted to know the gay sprig.'

'Borrowing!' echoed Jonas. 'Borrowing! When you're a twentieth part as rich as he is, you may shut up shop! We should be pretty well off if we could buy his furniture, and plate, and pictures, by clubbing together. A likely man to borrow: Mr Montague! Why since I was lucky enough (come! and I'll say, sharp enough, too) to get a share in the Assurance office that he's President of, I've made - never mind what I've made,' said Jonas, seeming to recover all at once his usual caution. 'You know me pretty well, and I don't blab about such things. But, Ecod, I've made a trifle.'

'Really, my dear Jonas,' cried Mr Pecksniff, with much warmth, 'a gentleman like this should receive some attention. Would he like to see the church? or if he has a taste for the fine arts - which I have no doubt he has, from the description you give of his circumstances - I can send him down a few portfolios. Salisbury Cathedral, my dear Jonas,' said Mr Pecksniff; the mention of the portfolios and his anxiety to display himself to advantage, suggesting his usual phraseology in that regard, 'is an edifice replete with venerable associations, and strikingly suggestive of the loftiest emotions. It is here we contemplate the work of bygone ages. It is here we listen to the swelling organ, as we stroll through the reverberating aisles. We have drawings of this celebrated structure from the North, from the South, from the East, from the West, from the South-East, from the Nor'West - '

During this digression, and indeed during the whole dialogue, Jonas had been rocking on his chair, with his hands in his pockets and his head thrown cunningly on one side. He looked at Mr Pecksniff now with such shrewd meaning twinkling in his eyes, that Mr Pecksniff stopped, and asked him what he was going to say.

'Ecod!' he answered. 'Pecksniff if I knew how you meant to leave your money, I could put you in the way of doubling it in no time. It wouldn't be bad to keep a chance like this snug in the family. But you're such a deep one!'

'Jonas!' cried Mr Pecksniff, much affected, 'I am not a diplomatical character; my heart is in my hand. By far the greater part of the inconsiderable savings I have accumulated in the course of - I hope - a

not dishonourable or useless career, is already given, devised, and bequeathed (correct me, my dear Jonas, if I am technically wrong), with expressions of confidence, which I will not repeat; and in securities which it is unnecessary to mention to a person whom I cannot, whom I will not, whom I need not, name.' Here he gave the hand of his son-in-law a fervent squeeze, as if he would have added, 'God bless you; be very careful of it when you get it!'

Mr Jonas only shook his head and laughed, and, seeming to think better of what he had had in his mind, said, 'No. He would keep his own counsel.' But as he observed that he would take a walk, Mr Pecksniff insisted on accompanying him, remarking that he could leave a card for Mr Montague, as they went along, by way of gentleman-usher to himself at dinner-time. Which he did.

In the course of their walk, Mr Jonas affected to maintain that close reserve which had operated as a timely check upon him during the foregoing dialogue. And as he made no attempt to conciliate Mr Pecksniff, but, on the contrary, was more boorish and rude to him than usual, that gentleman, so far from suspecting his real design, laid himself out to be attacked with advantage. For it is in the nature of a knave to think the tools with which he works indispensable to knavery; and knowing what he would do himself in such a case, Mr Pecksniff argued, 'if this young man wanted anything of me for his own ends, he would be polite and deferential.'

The more Jonas repelled him in his hints and inquiries, the more solicitous, therefore, Mr Pecksniff became to be initiated into the golden mysteries at which he had obscurely glanced. Why should there be cold and worldly secrets, he observed, between relations? What was life without confidence? If the chosen husband of his daughter, the man to whom he had delivered her with so much pride and hope, such bounding and such beaming joy; if he were not a green spot in the barren waste of life, where was that oasis to be bound?

Little did Mr Pecksniff think on what a very green spot he planted one foot at that moment! Little did he foresee when he said, 'All is but dust!' how very shortly he would come down with his own!

Inch by inch, in his grudging and ill-conditioned way; sustained to the life, for the hope of making Mr Pecksniff suffer in that tender place, the pocket, where Jonas smarted so terribly himself, gave him an additional and malicious interest in the wiles he was set on to practise; inch by inch, and bit by bit, Jonas rather allowed the dazzling prospects of the Anglo-Bengalee establishment to escape him, than paraded them before his greedy listener. And in the same niggardly spirit, he left Mr Pecksniff to infer, if he chose (which he DID

choose, of course), that a consciousness of not having any great natural gifts of speech and manner himself, rendered him desirous to have the credit of introducing to Mr Montague some one who was well endowed in those respects, and so atone for his own deficiencies. Otherwise, he muttered discontentedly, he would have seen his beloved father-in-law 'far enough off,' before he would have taken him into his confidence.

Primed in this artful manner, Mr Pecksniff presented himself at dinner-time in such a state of suavity, benevolence, cheerfulness, politeness, and cordiality, as even he had perhaps never attained before. The frankness of the country gentleman, the refinement of the artist, the good-humoured allowance of the man of the world; philanthropy, forbearance, piety, toleration, all blended together in a flexible adaptability to anything and everything; were expressed in Mr Pecksniff, as he shook hands with the great speculator and capitalist.

'Welcome, respected sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'to our humble village! We are a simple people; primitive clods, Mr Montague; but we can appreciate the honour of your visit, as my dear son-in-law can testify. It is very strange,' said Mr Pecksniff, pressing his hand almost reverentially, 'but I seem to know you. That towering forehead, my dear Jonas,' said Mr Pecksniff aside, 'and those clustering masses of rich hair - I must have seen you, my dear sir, in the sparkling throng.'

Nothing was more probable, they all agreed.

'I could have wished,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'to have had the honour of introducing you to an elderly inmate of our house: to the uncle of our friend. Mr Chuzzlewit, sir, would have been proud indeed to have taken you by the hand.'

'Is the gentleman here now?' asked Montague, turning deeply red. 'He is,' said Mr Pecksniff.

'You said nothing about that, Chuzzlewit.'

'I didn't suppose you'd care to hear of it,' returned Jonas. 'You wouldn't care to know him, I can promise you.'

'Jonas! my dear Jonas!' remonstrated Mr Pecksniff. 'Really!'

'Oh! it's all very well for you to speak up for him,' said Jonas. 'You have nailed him. You'll get a fortune by him.'

'Oho! Is the wind in that quarter?' cried Montague. 'Ha, ha, ha!' and here they all laughed - especially Mr Pecksniff.

'No, no!' said that gentleman, clapping his son-in-law playfully upon the shoulder. 'You must not believe all that my young relative says, Mr Montague. You may believe him in official business, and trust him in official business, but you must not attach importance to his flights of fancy.'

'Upon my life, Mr Pecksniff,' cried Montague, 'I attach the greatest importance to that last observation of his. I trust and hope it's true. Money cannot be turned and turned again quickly enough in the ordinary course, Mr Pecksniff. There is nothing like building our fortune on the weaknesses of mankind.'

'Oh fie! oh fie, for shame!' cried Mr Pecksniff. But they all laughed again - especially Mr Pecksniff.

'I give you my honour that WE do it,' said Montague.

'Oh fie, fie!' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'You are very pleasant. That I am sure you don't! That I am sure you don't! How CAN you, you know?'

Again they all laughed in concert; and again Mr Pecksniff laughed especially.

This was very agreeable indeed. It was confidential, easy, straightforward; and still left Mr Pecksniff in the position of being in a gentle way the Mentor of the party. The greatest achievements in the article of cookery that the Dragon had ever performed, were set before them; the oldest and best wines in the Dragon's cellar saw the light on that occasion; a thousand bubbles, indicative of the wealth and station of Mr Montague in the depths of his pursuits, were constantly rising to the surface of the conversation; and they were as frank and merry as three honest men could be. Mr Pecksniff thought it a pity (he said so) that Mr Montague should think lightly of mankind and their weaknesses. He was anxious upon this subject; his mind ran upon it; in one way or another he was constantly coming back to it; he must make a convert of him, he said. And as often as Mr Montague repeated his sentiment about building fortunes on the weaknesses of mankind, and added frankly, 'WE do it!' just as often Mr Pecksniff repeated 'Oh fie! oh fie, for shame! I am sure you don't. How CAN you, you know?' laying a greater stress each time on those last words.

The frequent repetition of this playful inquiry on the part of Mr Pecksniff, led at last to playful answers on the part of Mr Montague; but after some little sharp-shooting on both sides, Mr Pecksniff became grave, almost to tears; observing that if Mr Montague would give him leave, he would drink the health of his young kinsman, Mr Jonas; congratulating him upon the valuable and distinguished friendship he had formed, but envying him, he would confess, his

usefulness to his fellow-creatures. For, if he understood the objects of that Institution with which he was newly and advantageously connected - knowing them but imperfectly - they were calculated to do Good; and for his (Mr Pecksniff's) part, if he could in any way promote them, he thought he would be able to lay his head upon his pillow every night, with an absolute certainty of going to sleep at once.

The transition from this accidental remark (for it was quite accidental and had fallen from Mr Pecksniff in the openness of his soul), to the discussion of the subject as a matter of business, was easy. Books, papers, statements, tables, calculations of various kinds, were soon spread out before them; and as they were all framed with one object, it is not surprising that they should all have tended to one end. But still, whenever Montague enlarged upon the profits of the office, and said that as long as there were gulls upon the wing it must succeed, Mr Pecksniff mildly said 'Oh fie!' - and might indeed have remonstrated with him, but that he knew he was joking. Mr Pecksniff did know he was joking; because he said so.

There never had been before, and there never would be again, such an opportunity for the investment of a considerable sum (the rate of advantage increased in proportion to the amount invested), as at that moment. The only time that had at all approached it, was the time when Jonas had come into the concern; which made him ill-natured now, and inclined him to pick out a doubt in this place, and a flaw in that, and grumbling to advise Mr Pecksniff to think better of it. The sum which would complete the proprietorship in this snug concern, was nearly equal to Mr Pecksniff's whole hoard; not counting Mr Chuzzlewit, that is to say, whom he looked upon as money in the Bank, the possession of which inclined him the more to make a dash with his own private sprats for the capture of such a whale as Mr Montague described. The returns began almost immediately, and were immense. The end of it was, that Mr Pecksniff agreed to become the last partner and proprietor in the Anglo-Bengalee, and made an appointment to dine with Mr Montague, at Salisbury, on the next day but one, then and there to complete the negotiation.

It took so long to bring the subject to this head, that it was nearly midnight when they parted. When Mr Pecksniff walked downstairs to the door, he found Mrs Lupin standing there, looking out.

'Ah, my good friend!' he said; 'not a-bed yet! Contemplating the stars, Mrs Lupin?'

'It's a beautiful starlight night, sir.'

'A beautiful starlight night,' said Mr Pecksniff, looking up. 'Behold the planets, how they shine! Behold the - those two persons who were here this morning have left your house, I hope, Mrs Lupin?'

'Yes, sir. They are gone.'

'I am glad to hear it,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Behold the wonders of the firmament, Mrs Lupin! how glorious is the scene! When I look up at those shining orbs, I think that each of them is winking to the other to take notice of the vanity of men's pursuits. My fellowmen!' cried Mr Pecksniff, shaking his head in pity; 'you are much mistaken; my wormy relatives, you are much deceived! The stars are perfectly contented (I suppose so) in their several spheres. Why are not you? Oh! do not strive and struggle to enrich yourselves, or to get the better of each other, my deluded friends, but look up there, with me!'

Mrs Lupin shook her head, and heaved a sigh. It was very affecting.

'Look up there, with me!' repeated Mr Pecksniff, stretching out his hand; 'With me, a humble individual who is also an insect like yourselves. Can silver, gold, or precious stones, sparkle like those constellations! I think not. Then do not thirst for silver, gold, or precious stones; but look up there, with me!'

With those words, the good man patted Mrs Lupin's hand between his own, as if he would have added 'think of this, my good woman!' and walked away in a sort of ecstasy or rapture, with his hat under his arm.

Jonas sat in the attitude in which Mr Pecksniff had left him, gazing moodily at his friend; who, surrounded by a heap of documents, was writing something on an oblong slip of paper.

'You mean to wait at Salisbury over the day after to-morrow, do you, then?' said Jonas.

'You heard our appointment,' returned Montague, without raising his eyes. 'In any case I should have waited to see after the boy.'

They appeared to have changed places again; Montague being in high spirits; Jonas gloomy and lowering.

'You don't want me, I suppose?' said Jonas.

'I want you to put your name here,' he returned, glancing at him with a smile, 'as soon as I have filled up the stamp. I may as well have your note of hand for that extra capital. That's all I want. If you wish to go

home, I can manage Mr Pecksniff now, alone. There is a perfect understanding between us.'

Jonas sat scowling at him as he wrote, in silence. When he had finished his writing, and had dried it on the blotting paper in his travelling-desk; he looked up, and tossed the pen towards him.

'What, not a day's grace, not a day's trust, eh?' said Jonas bitterly. 'Not after the pains I have taken with to-night's work?'

'To night's work was a part of our bargain,' replied Montague; 'and so was this.'

'You drive a hard bargain,' said Jonas, advancing to the table. 'You know best. Give it here!'

Montague gave him the paper. After pausing as if he could not make up his mind to put his name to it, Jonas dipped his pen hastily in the nearest inkstand, and began to write. But he had scarcely marked the paper when he started back, in a panic.

'Why, what the devil's this?' he said. 'It's bloody!'

He had dipped the pen, as another moment showed, into red ink. But he attached a strange degree of importance to the mistake. He asked how it had come there, who had brought it, why it had been brought; and looked at Montague, at first, as if he thought he had put a trick upon him. Even when he used a different pen, and the right ink, he made some scratches on another paper first, as half believing they would turn red also.

'Black enough, this time,' he said, handing the note to Montague. 'Good-bye.'

'Going now! how do you mean to get away from here?'

'I shall cross early in the morning to the high road, before you are out of bed; and catch the day-coach, going up. Good-bye!'

'You are in a hurry!'

'I have something to do,' said Jonas. 'Good-bye!'

His friend looked after him as he went out, in surprise, which gradually gave place to an air of satisfaction and relief.

'It happens all the better. It brings about what I wanted, without any difficulty. I shall travel home alone.'