

Chapter XLVI

In Which Miss Pecksniff Makes Love, Mr Jonas Makes Wrath, Mrs Gamp Makes Tea, And Mr Chuffey Makes Business

On the next day's official duties coming to a close, Tom hurried home without losing any time by the way; and after dinner and a short rest sallied out again, accompanied by Ruth, to pay his projected visit to Todgers's. Tom took Ruth with him, not only because it was a great pleasure to him to have her for his companion whenever he could, but because he wished her to cherish and comfort poor Merry; which she, for her own part (having heard the wretched history of that young wife from Tom), was all eagerness to do.

'She was so glad to see me,' said Tom, 'that I am sure she will be glad to see you. Your sympathy is certain to be much more delicate and acceptable than mine.'

'I am very far from being certain of that, Tom,' she replied; 'and indeed you do yourself an injustice. Indeed you do. But I hope she may like me, Tom.'

'Oh, she is sure to do that!' cried Tom, confidently.

'What a number of friends I should have, if everybody was of your way of thinking. Shouldn't I, Tom, dear?' said his little sister pinching him upon the cheek.

Tom laughed, and said that with reference to this particular case he had no doubt at all of finding a disciple in Merry. 'For you women,' said Tom, 'you women, my dear, are so kind, and in your kindness have such nice perception; you know so well how to be affectionate and full of solicitude without appearing to be; your gentleness of feeling is like your touch so light and easy, that the one enables you to deal with wounds of the mind as tenderly as the other enables you to deal with wounds of the body. You are such - '

'My goodness, Tom!' his sister interposed. 'You ought to fall in love immediately.'

Tom put this observation off good humouredly, but somewhat gravely too; and they were soon very chatty again on some other subject.

As they were passing through a street in the City, not very far from Mrs Todgers's place of residence, Ruth checked Tom before the window of a large Upholstery and Furniture Warehouse, to call his attention to something very magnificent and ingenious, displayed there to the best advantage, for the admiration and temptation of the

public. Tom had hazarded some most erroneous and extravagantly wrong guess in relation to the price of this article, and had joined his sister in laughing heartily at his mistake, when he pressed her arm in his, and pointed to two persons at a little distance, who were looking in at the same window with a deep interest in the chests of drawers and tables.

'Hush!' Tom whispered. 'Miss Pecksniff, and the young gentleman to whom she is going to be married.'

'Why does he look as if he was going to be buried, Tom?' inquired his little sister.

'Why, he is naturally a dismal young gentleman, I believe,' said Tom 'but he is very civil and inoffensive.'

'I suppose they are furnishing their house,' whispered Ruth.

'Yes, I suppose they are,' replied Tom. 'We had better avoid speaking to them.'

They could not very well avoid looking at them, however, especially as some obstruction on the pavement, at a little distance, happened to detain them where they were for a few moments. Miss Pecksniff had quite the air of having taken the unhappy Moddle captive, and brought him up to the contemplation of the furniture like a lamb to the altar. He offered no resistance, but was perfectly resigned and quiet. The melancholy depicted in the turn of his languishing head, and in his dejected attitude, was extreme; and though there was a full-sized four-post bedstead in the window, such a tear stood trembling in his eye as seemed to blot it out.

'Augustus, my love,' said Miss Pecksniff, 'ask the price of the eight rosewood chairs, and the loo table.'

'Perhaps they are ordered already,' said Augustus. 'Perhaps they are Another's.'

'They can make more like them, if they are,' rejoined Miss Pecksniff.

'No, no, they can't,' said Moddle. 'It's impossible!'

He appeared, for the moment, to be quite overwhelmed and stupefied by the prospect of his approaching happiness; but recovering, entered the shop. He returned immediately, saying in a tone of despair

'Twenty-four pound ten!'

Miss Pecksniff, turning to receive this announcement, became conscious of the observation of Tom Pinch and his sister.

'Oh, really!' cried Miss Pecksniff, glancing about her, as if for some convenient means of sinking into the earth. 'Upon my word, I - there never was such a - to think that one should be so very - Mr Augustus Moddle, Miss Pinch!'

Miss Pecksniff was quite gracious to Miss Pinch in this triumphant introduction; exceedingly gracious. She was more than gracious; she was kind and cordial. Whether the recollection of the old service Tom had rendered her in knocking Mr Jonas on the head had wrought this change in her opinions; or whether her separation from her parent had reconciled her to all human-kind, or to all that interesting portion of human-kind which was not friendly to him; or whether the delight of having some new female acquaintance to whom to communicate her interesting prospects was paramount to every other consideration; cordial and kind Miss Pecksniff was. And twice Miss Pecksniff kissed Miss Pinch upon the cheek.

'Augustus - Mr Pinch, you know. My dear girl!' said Miss Pecksniff, aside. 'I never was so ashamed in my life.'

Ruth begged her not to think of it.

'I mind your brother less than anybody else,' simpered Miss Pecksniff. 'But the indelicacy of meeting any gentleman under such circumstances! Augustus, my child, did you - '

Here Miss Pecksniff whispered in his ear. The suffering Moddle repeated:

'Twenty-four pound ten!'

'Oh, you silly man! I don't mean them,' said Miss Pecksniff. 'I am speaking of the - '

Here she whispered him again.

'If it's the same patterned chintz as that in the window; thirty-two, twelve, six,' said Moddle, with a sigh. 'And very dear.'

Miss Pecksniff stopped him from giving any further explanation by laying her hand upon his lips, and betraying a soft embarrassment. She then asked Tom Pinch which way he was going.

'I was going to see if I could find your sister,' answered Tom, 'to whom I wished to say a few words. We were going to Mrs Todgers's, where I had the pleasure of seeing her before.'

'It's of no use your going on, then,' said Cherry, 'for we have not long left there; and I know she is not at home. But I'll take you to my sister's house, if you please. Augustus - Mr Moddle, I mean - and myself, are on our way to tea there, now. You needn't think of HIM,' she added, nodding her head as she observed some hesitation on Tom's part. 'He is not at home.'

'Are you sure?' asked Tom.

'Oh, I am quite sure of that. I don't want any MORE revenge,' said Miss Pecksniff, expressively. 'But, really, I must beg you two gentlemen to walk on, and allow me to follow with Miss Pinch. My dear, I never was so taken by surprise!'

In furtherance of this bashful arrangement, Moddle gave his arm to Tom; and Miss Pecksniff linked her own in Ruth's.

'Of course, my love,' said Miss Pecksniff, 'it would be useless for me to disguise, after what you have seen, that I am about to be united to the gentleman who is walking with your brother. It would be in vain to conceal it. What do you think of him? Pray, let me have your candid opinion.'

Ruth intimated that, as far as she could judge, he was a very eligible swain.

'I am curious to know,' said Miss Pecksniff, with loquacious frankness, 'whether you have observed, or fancied, in this very short space of time, that he is of a rather melancholy turn?'

'So very short a time,' Ruth pleaded.

'No, no; but don't let that interfere with your answer,' returned Miss Pecksniff. 'I am curious to hear what you say.'

Ruth acknowledged that he had impressed her at first sight as looking 'rather low.'

'No, really?' said Miss Pecksniff. 'Well! that is quite remarkable! Everybody says the same. Mrs Todgers says the same; and Augustus informs me that it is quite a joke among the gentlemen in the house. Indeed, but for the positive commands I have laid upon him, I believe it would have been the occasion of loaded fire-arms being resorted to

more than once. What do you think is the cause of his appearance of depression?'

Ruth thought of several things; such as his digestion, his tailor, his mother, and the like. But hesitating to give utterance to any one of them, she refrained from expressing an opinion.

'My dear,' said Miss Pecksniff; 'I shouldn't wish it to be known, but I don't mind mentioning it to you, having known your brother for so many years - I refused Augustus three times. He is of a most amiable and sensitive nature, always ready to shed tears if you look at him, which is extremely charming; and he has never recovered the effect of that cruelty. For it WAS cruel,' said Miss Pecksniff, with a self-conviction candour that might have adorned the diadem of her own papa. 'There is no doubt of it. I look back upon my conduct now with blushes. I always liked him. I felt that he was not to me what the crowd of young men who had made proposals had been, but something very different. Then what right had I to refuse him three times?'

'It was a severe trial of his fidelity, no doubt,' said Ruth.

'My dear,' returned Miss Pecksniff. 'It was wrong. But such is the caprice and thoughtlessness of our sex! Let me be a warning to you. Don't try the feelings of any one who makes you an offer, as I have tried the feelings of Augustus; but if you ever feel towards a person as I really felt towards him, at the very time when I was driving him to distraction, let that feeling find expression, if that person throws himself at your feet, as Augustus Moddle did at mine. Think,' said Miss Pecksniff, 'what my feelings would have been, if I had goaded him to suicide, and it had got into the papers!'

Ruth observed that she would have been full of remorse, no doubt.

'Remorse!' cried Miss Pecksniff, in a sort of snug and comfortable penitence. 'What my remorse is at this moment, even after making reparation by accepting him, it would be impossible to tell you! Looking back upon my giddy self, my dear, now that I am sobered down and made thoughtful, by treading on the very brink of matrimony; and contemplating myself as I was when I was like what you are now; I shudder. I shudder. What is the consequence of my past conduct? Until Augustus leads me to the altar he is not sure of me. I have blighted and withered the affections of his heart to that extent that he is not sure of me. I see that preying on his mind and feeding on his vitals. What are the reproaches of my conscience, when I see this in the man I love!'

Ruth endeavoured to express some sense of her unbounded and flattering confidence; and presumed that she was going to be married soon.

'Very soon indeed,' returned Miss Pecksniff. 'As soon as our house is ready. We are furnishing now as fast as we can.'

In the same vein of confidence Miss Pecksniff ran through a general inventory of the articles that were already bought with the articles that remained to be purchased; what garments she intended to be married in, and where the ceremony was to be performed; and gave Miss Pinch, in short (as she told her), early and exclusive information on all points of interest connected with the event.

While this was going forward in the rear, Tom and Mr Moddle walked on, arm in arm, in the front, in a state of profound silence, which Tom at last broke; after thinking for a long time what he could say that should refer to an indifferent topic, in respect of which he might rely, with some degree of certainty, on Mr Moddle's bosom being unruffled.

'I wonder,' said Tom, 'that in these crowded streets the foot-passengers are not oftener run over.'

Mr Moddle, with a dark look, replied:

'The drivers won't do it.'

'Do you mean?' Tom began -

'That there are some men,' interrupted Moddle, with a hollow laugh, 'who can't get run over. They live a charmed life. Coal waggons recoil from them, and even cabs refuse to run them down. Ah!' said Augustus, marking Tom's astonishment. 'There are such men. One of 'em is a friend of mine.'

'Upon my word and honour,' thought Tom, 'this young gentleman is in a state of mind which is very serious indeed!' Abandoning all idea of conversation, he did not venture to say another word, but he was careful to keep a tight hold upon Augustus's arm, lest he should fly into the road, and making another and a more successful attempt, should get up a private little Juggernaut before the eyes of his betrothed. Tom was so afraid of his committing this rash act, that he had scarcely ever experienced such mental relief as when they arrived in safety at Mrs Jonas Chuzzlewit's house.

'Walk up, pray, Mr Pinch,' said Miss Pecksniff. For Tom halted, irresolutely, at the door.

'I am doubtful whether I should be welcome,' replied Tom, 'or, I ought rather to say, I have no doubt about it. I will send up a message, I think.'

'But what nonsense that is!' returned Miss Pecksniff, speaking apart to Tom. 'He is not at home, I am certain. I know he is not; and Merry hasn't the least idea that you ever - '

'No,' interrupted Tom. 'Nor would I have her know it, on any account. I am not so proud of that scuffle, I assure you.'

'Ah, but then you are so modest, you see,' returned Miss Pecksniff, with a smile. 'But pray walk up. If you don't wish her to know it, and do wish to speak to her, pray walk up. Pray walk up, Miss Pinch. Don't stand here.'

Tom still hesitated for he felt that he was in an awkward position. But Cherry passing him at this juncture, and leading his sister upstairs, and the house-door being at the same time shut behind them, he followed without quite knowing whether it was well or ill-judged so to do.

'Merry, my darling!' said the fair Miss Pecksniff, opening the door of the usual sitting-room. 'Here are Mr Pinch and his sister come to see you! I thought we should find you here, Mrs Todgers! How do you do, Mrs Gamp? And how do you do, Mr Chuffey, though it's of no use asking you the question, I am well aware.'

Honouring each of these parties, as she severally addressed them, with an acid smile, Miss Charity presented 'Mr Moddle.'

'I believe you have seen HIM before,' she pleasantly observed. 'Augustus, my sweet child, bring me a chair.'

The sweet child did as he was told; and was then about to retire into a corner to mourn in secret, when Miss Charity, calling him in an audible whisper a 'little pet,' gave him leave to come and sit beside her. It is to be hoped, for the general cheerfulness of mankind, that such a doleful little pet was never seen as Mr Moddle looked when he complied. So despondent was his temper, that he showed no outward thrill of ecstasy when Miss Pecksniff placed her lily hand in his, and concealed this mark of her favour from the vulgar gaze by covering it with a corner of her shawl. Indeed, he was infinitely more rueful than he had been before; and, sitting uncomfortably upright in his chair, surveyed the company with watery eyes, which seemed to say, without the aid of language, 'Oh, good gracious! look here! Won't some kind Christian help me!'

But the ecstasies of Mrs Gamp were sufficient to have furnished forth a score of young lovers; and they were chiefly awakened by the sight of Tom Pinch and his sister. Mrs Gamp was a lady of that happy temperament which can be ecstatic without any other stimulating cause than a general desire to establish a large and profitable connection. She added daily so many strings to her bow, that she made a perfect harp of it; and upon that instrument she now began to perform an extemporaneous concerto.

'Why, goodness me!' she said, 'Mrs Chuzzlewit! To think as I should see beneath this blessed 'ouse, which well I know it, Miss Pecksniff, my sweet young lady, to be a 'ouse as there is not a many like, worse luck, and wishin' it were not so, which then this tearful walley would be changed into a flowerin' guardian, Mr Chuffey; to think as I should see beneath this indiwidle roof, identically comin', Mr Pinch (I take the liberty, though almost unbeknown), and do assure you of it, sir, the smiliness and sweetest face as ever, Mrs Chuzzlewit, I see exceptin' yourn, my dear good lady, and YOUR good lady's too, sir, Mr Moddle, if I may make so bold as speak so plain of what is plain enough to them as needn't look through millstones, Mrs Todgers, to find out wot is wrote upon the wall behind. Which no offence is meant, ladies and gentlemen; none bein' took, I hope. To think as I should see that smiliness and sweetest face which me and another friend of mine, took notice of among the packages down London Bridge, in this promiscuous place, is a surprize in-deed!'

Having contrived, in this happy manner, to invest every member of her audience with an individual share and immediate personal interest in her address, Mrs Gamp dropped several curtseys to Ruth, and smilingly shaking her head a great many times, pursued the thread of her discourse:

'Now, ain't we rich in beauty this here joyful arternoon, I'm sure. I knows a lady, which her name, I'll not deceive you, Mrs Chuzzlewit, is Harris, her husband's brother bein' six foot three, and marked with a mad bull in Wellington boots upon his left arm, on account of his precious mother havin' been worried by one into a shoemaker's shop, when in a sitiuation which blessed is the man as has his quiver full of sech, as many times I've said to Gamp when words has roge betwixt us on account of the expense - and often have I said to Mrs Harris, 'Oh, Mrs Harris, ma'am! your countenance is quite a angel's!' Which, but for Pimples, it would be. 'No, Sairey Gamp,' says she, 'you best of hard-working and industrious creeturs as ever was underpaid at any price, which underpaid you are, quite diff'rent. Harris had it done afore marriage at ten and six,' she says, 'and wore it faithful next his heart till the colour run, when the money was declined to be give back, and no arrangement could be come to. But he never said it was a angel's, Sairey, wotever he might have thought.' If Mrs Harris's

husband was here now,' said Mrs Gamp, looking round, and chuckling as she dropped a general curtsey, 'he'd speak out plain, he would, and his dear wife would be the last to blame him! For if ever a woman lived as know'd not wot it was to form a wish to pizon them as had good looks, and had no reasion give her by the best of husbands, Mrs Harris is that ev'nly dispogician!'

With these words the worthy woman, who appeared to have dropped in to take tea as a delicate little attention, rather than to have any engagement on the premises in an official capacity, crossed to Mr Chuffey, who was seated in the same corner as of old, and shook him by the shoulder.

'Rouge yourself, and look up! Come!' said Mrs Gamp. 'Here's company, Mr Chuffey.'

'I am sorry for it,' cried the old man, looking humbly round the room. 'I know I'm in the way. I ask pardon, but I've nowhere else to go to. Where is she?'

Merry went to him.

'Ah!' said the old man, patting her on the check. 'Here she is. Here she is! She's never hard on poor old Chuffey. Poor old Chuff!'

As she took her seat upon a low chair by the old man's side, and put herself within the reach of his hand, she looked up once at Tom. It was a sad look that she cast upon him, though there was a faint smile trembling on her face. It was a speaking look, and Tom knew what it said. 'You see how misery has changed me. I can feel for a dependant NOW, and set some value on his attachment.'

'Aye, aye!' cried Chuffey in a soothing tone. 'Aye, aye, aye! Never mind him. It's hard to hear, but never mind him. He'll die one day. There are three hundred and sixty-five days in the year - three hundred and sixty-six in leap year - and he may die on any one of 'em.'

'You're a wearing old soul, and that's the sacred truth,' said Mrs Gamp, contemplating him from a little distance with anything but favour, as he continued to mutter to himself. 'It's a pity that you don't know wot you say, for you'd tire your own patience out if you did, and fret yourself into a happy releage for all as knows you.'

'His son,' murmured the old man, lifting up his hand. 'His son!'

'Well, I'm sure!' said Mrs Gamp, 'you're a-settlin' of it, Mr Chuffey. To your satigefaction, sir, I hope. But I wouldn't lay a new pincushion on it myself, sir, though you ARE so well informed. Drat the old creetur,

he's a-layin' down the law tolerable confident, too! A deal he knows of sons! or darters either! Suppose you was to favour us with some remarks on twins, sir, WOULD you be so good!

The bitter and indignant sarcasm which Mrs Gamp conveyed into these taunts was altogether lost on the unconscious Chuffey, who appeared to be as little cognizant of their delivery as of his having given Mrs Gamp offence. But that high-minded woman being sensitively alive to any invasion of her professional province, and imagining that Mr Chuffey had given utterance to some prediction on the subject of sons, which ought to have emanated in the first instance from herself as the only lawful authority, or which should at least have been on no account proclaimed without her sanction and concurrence, was not so easily appeased. She continued to sidle at Mr Chuffey with looks of sharp hostility, and to defy him with many other ironical remarks, uttered in that low key which commonly denotes suppressed indignation; until the entrance of the teaboard, and a request from Mrs Jonas that she would make tea at a side-table for the party that had unexpectedly assembled, restored her to herself. She smiled again, and entered on her ministration with her own particular urbanity.

'And quite a family it is to make tea for,' said Mrs Gamp; 'and wot a happiness to do it! My good young 'ooman' - to the servant-girl - 'p'raps somebody would like to try a new-laid egg or two, not biled too hard. Likeways, a few rounds o' buttered toast, first cuttin' off the crust, in consequence of tender teeth, and not too many of 'em; which Gamp himself, Mrs Chuzzlewit, at one blow, being in liquor, struck out four, two single, and two double, as was took by Mrs Harris for a keepsake, and is carried in her pocket at this present hour, along with two cramp-bones, a bit o' ginger, and a grater like a blessed infant's shoe, in tin, with a little heel to put the nutmeg in; as many times I've seen and said, and used for candle when required, within the month.'

As the privileges of the side-table - besides including the small prerogatives of sitting next the toast, and taking two cups of tea to other people's one, and always taking them at a crisis, that is to say, before putting fresh water into the tea-pot, and after it had been standing for some time - also comprehended a full view of the company, and an opportunity of addressing them as from a rostrum, Mrs Gamp discharged the functions entrusted to her with extreme good-humour and affability. Sometimes resting her saucer on the palm of her outspread hand, and supporting her elbow on the table, she stopped between her sips of tea to favour the circle with a smile, a wink, a roll of the head, or some other mark of notice; and at those periods her countenance was lighted up with a degree of intelligence and vivacity, which it was almost impossible to separate from the benignant influence of distilled waters.

But for Mrs Gamp, it would have been a curiously silent party. Miss Pecksniff only spoke to her Augustus, and to him in whispers. Augustus spoke to nobody, but sighed for every one, and occasionally gave himself such a sounding slap upon the forehead as would make Mrs Todgers, who was rather nervous, start in her chair with an involuntary exclamation. Mrs Todgers was occupied in knitting, and seldom spoke. Poor Merry held the hand of cheerful little Ruth between her own, and listening with evident pleasure to all she said, but rarely speaking herself, sometimes smiled, and sometimes kissed her on the cheek, and sometimes turned aside to hide the tears that trembled in her eyes. Tom felt this change in her so much, and was so glad to see how tenderly Ruth dealt with her, and how she knew and answered to it, that he had not the heart to make any movement towards their departure, although he had long since given utterance to all he came to say.

The old clerk, subsiding into his usual state, remained profoundly silent, while the rest of the little assembly were thus occupied, intent upon the dreams, whatever they might be, which hardly seemed to stir the surface of his sluggish thoughts. The bent of these dull fancies combining probably with the silent feasting that was going on about him, and some struggling recollection of the last approach to revelry he had witnessed, suggested a strange question to his mind. He looked round upon a sudden, and said:

'Who's lying dead upstairs?'

'No one,' said Merry, turning to him. 'What is the matter? We are all here.'

'All here!' cried the old man. 'All here! Where is he then - my old master, Mr Chuzzlewit, who had the only son? Where is he?'

'Hush! Hush!' said Merry, speaking kindly to him. 'That happened long ago. Don't you recollect?'

'Recollect!' rejoined the old man, with a cry of grief. 'As if I could forget! As if I ever could forget!'

He put his hand up to his face for a moment; and then repeated turning round exactly as before:

'Who's lying dead upstairs?'

'No one!' said Merry.

At first he gazed angrily upon her, as upon a stranger who endeavoured to deceive him; but peering into her face, and seeing that it was indeed she, he shook his head in sorrowful compassion.

'You think not. But they don't tell you. No, no, poor thing! They don't tell you. Who are these, and why are they merry-making here, if there is no one dead? Foul play! Go see who it is!'

She made a sign to them not to speak to him, which indeed they had little inclination to do; and remained silent herself. So did he for a short time; but then he repeated the same question with an eagerness that had a peculiar terror in it.

'There's some one dead,' he said, 'or dying; and I want to know who it is. Go see, go see! Where's Jonas?'

'In the country,' she replied.

The old man gazed at her as if he doubted what she said, or had not heard her; and, rising from his chair, walked across the room and upstairs, whispering as he went, 'Foul play!' They heard his footsteps overhead, going up into that corner of the room in which the bed stood (it was there old Anthony had died); and then they heard him coming down again immediately. His fancy was not so strong or wild that it pictured to him anything in the deserted bedchamber which was not there; for he returned much calmer, and appeared to have satisfied himself.

'They don't tell you,' he said to Merry in his quavering voice, as he sat down again, and patted her upon the head. 'They don't tell me either; but I'll watch, I'll watch. They shall not hurt you; don't be frightened. When you have sat up watching, I have sat up watching too. Aye, aye, I have!' he piped out, clenching his weak, shrivelled hand. 'Many a night I have been ready!'

He said this with such trembling gaps and pauses in his want of breath, and said it in his jealous secrecy so closely in her ear, that little or nothing of it was understood by the visitors. But they had heard and seen enough of the old man to be disquieted, and to have left their seats and gathered about him; thereby affording Mrs Gamp, whose professional coolness was not so easily disturbed, an eligible opportunity for concentrating the whole resources of her powerful mind and appetite upon the toast and butter, tea and eggs. She had brought them to bear upon those viands with such vigour that her face was in the highest state of inflammation, when she now (there being nothing left to eat or drink) saw fit to interpose.

'Why, highty tighty, sir!' cried Mrs Gamp, 'is these your manners? You want a pitcher of cold water throw'd over you to bring you round; that's my belief, and if you was under Betsey Prig you'd have it, too, I do assure you, Mr Chuffey. Spanish Flies is the only thing to draw this nonsense out of you; and if anybody wanted to do you a kindness, they'd clap a blister of 'em on your head, and put a mustard poultige on your back. 'Who's dead, indeed! It wouldn't be no grievous loss if some one was, I think!'

'He's quiet now, Mrs Gamp,' said Merry. 'Don't disturb him.'

'Oh, bother the old wictim, Mrs Chuzzlewit,' replied that zealous lady, 'I ain't no patience with him. You give him his own way too much by half. A worritin' wexagious creetur!'

No doubt with the view of carrying out the precepts she enforced, and 'bothering the old wictim' in practice as well as in theory, Mrs Gamp took him by the collar of his coat, and gave him some dozen or two of hearty shakes backward and forward in his chair; that exercise being considered by the disciples of the Prig school of nursing (who are very numerous among professional ladies) as exceedingly conducive to repose, and highly beneficial to the performance of the nervous functions. Its effect in this instance was to render the patient so giddy and addle-headed, that he could say nothing more; which Mrs Gamp regarded as the triumph of her art.

'There!' she said, loosening the old man's cravat, in consequence of his being rather black in the face, after this scientific treatment. 'Now, I hope, you're easy in your mind. If you should turn at all faint we can soon revive you, sir, I promige you. Bite a person's thumbs, or turn their fingers the wrong way,' said Mrs Gamp, smiling with the consciousness of at once imparting pleasure and instruction to her auditors, 'and they comes to, wonderful, Lord bless you!'

As this excellent woman had been formerly entrusted with the care of Mr Chuffey on a previous occasion, neither Mrs Jonas nor anybody else had the resolution to interfere directly with her mode of treatment; though all present (Tom Pinch and his sister especially) appeared to be disposed to differ from her views. For such is the rash boldness of the uninitiated, that they will frequently set up some monstrous abstract principle, such as humanity, or tenderness, or the like idle folly, in obstinate defiance of all precedent and usage; and will even venture to maintain the same against the persons who have made the precedents and established the usage, and who must therefore be the best and most impartial judges of the subject.

'Ah, Mr Pinch!' said Miss Pecksniff. 'It all comes of this unfortunate marriage. If my sister had not been so precipitate, and had not united

herself to a Wretch, there would have been no Mr Chuffey in the house.'

'Hush!' cried Tom. 'She'll hear you.'

'I should be very sorry if she did hear me, Mr Pinch,' said Cherry, raising her voice a little; 'for it is not in my nature to add to the uneasiness of any person; far less of my own sister. I know what a sister's duties are, Mr Pinch, and I hope I always showed it in my practice. Augustus, my dear child, find my pocket-handkerchief, and give it to me.'

Augustus obeyed, and took Mrs Todgers aside to pour his griefs into her friendly bosom.

'I am sure, Mr Pinch,' said Charity, looking after her betrothed and glancing at her sister, 'that I ought to be very grateful for the blessings I enjoy, and those which are yet in store for me. When I contrast Augustus' - here she was modest and embarrassed - 'who, I don't mind saying to you, is all softness, mildness, and devotion, with the detestable man who is my sister's husband; and when I think, Mr Pinch, that in the dispensations of this world, our cases might have been reversed; I have much to be thankful for, indeed, and much to make me humble and contented.'

Contented she might have been, but humble she assuredly was not. Her face and manner experienced something so widely different from humility, that Tom could not help understanding and despising the base motives that were working in her breast. He turned away, and said to Ruth, that it was time for them to go.

'I will write to your husband,' said Tom to Merry, 'and explain to him, as I would have done if I had met him here, that if he has sustained any inconvenience through my means, it is not my fault; a postman not being more innocent of the news he brings, than I was when I handed him that letter.'

'I thank you!' said Merry. 'It may do some good.'

She parted tenderly from Ruth, who with her brother was in the act of leaving the room, when a key was heard in the lock of the door below, and immediately afterwards a quick footstep in the passage. Tom stopped, and looked at Merry.

It was Jonas, she said timidly.

'I had better not meet him on the stairs, perhaps,' said Tom, drawing his sister's arm through his, and coming back a step or two. 'I'll wait for him here, a moment.'

He had scarcely said it when the door opened, and Jonas entered. His wife came forward to receive him; but he put her aside with his hand, and said in a surly tone:

'I didn't know you'd got a party.'

As he looked, at the same time, either by accident or design, towards Miss Pecksniff; and as Miss Pecksniff was only too delighted to quarrel with him, she instantly resented it.

'Oh dear!' she said, rising. 'Pray don't let us intrude upon your domestic happiness! That would be a pity. We have taken tea here, sir, in your absence; but if you will have the goodness to send us a note of the expense, receipted, we shall be happy to pay it. Augustus, my love, we will go, if you please. Mrs Todgers, unless you wish to remain here, we shall be happy to take you with us. It would be a pity, indeed, to spoil the bliss which this gentleman always brings with him, especially into his own home.'

'Charity! Charity!' remonstrated her sister, in such a heartfelt tone that she might have been imploring her to show the cardinal virtue whose name she bore.

'Merry, my dear, I am much obliged to you for your advice,' returned Miss Pecksniff, with a stately scorn - by the way, she had not been offered any - 'but I am not his slave - '

'No, nor wouldn't have been if you could,' interrupted Jonas. 'We know all about it.'

'WHAT did you say, sir?' cried Miss Pecksniff, sharply.

'Didn't you hear?' retorted Jonas, lounging down upon a chair. 'I am not a-going to say it again. If you like to stay, you may stay. If you like to go, you may go. But if you stay, please to be civil.'

'Beast!' cried Miss Pecksniff, sweeping past him. 'Augustus! He is beneath your notice!' Augustus had been making some faint and sickly demonstration of shaking his fist. 'Come away, child,' screamed Miss Pecksniff, 'I command you!'

The scream was elicited from her by Augustus manifesting an intention to return and grapple with him. But Miss Pecksniff giving the fiery youth a pull, and Mrs Todgers giving him a push they all

three tumbled out of the room together, to the music of Miss Pecksniff's shrill remonstrances.

All this time Jonas had seen nothing of Tom and his sister; for they were almost behind the door when he opened it, and he had sat down with his back towards them, and had purposely kept his eyes upon the opposite side of the street during his altercation with Miss Pecksniff, in order that his seeming carelessness might increase the exasperation of that wronged young damsel. His wife now faltered out that Tom had been waiting to see him; and Tom advanced.

The instant he presented himself, Jonas got up from his chair, and swearing a great oath, caught it in his grasp, as if he would have felled Tom to the ground with it. As he most unquestionably would have done, but that his very passion and surprise made him irresolute, and gave Tom, in his calmness, an opportunity of being heard.

'You have no cause to be violent, sir,' said Tom. 'Though what I wish to say relates to your own affairs, I know nothing of them, and desire to know nothing of them.'

Jonas was too enraged to speak. He held the door open; and stamping his foot upon the ground, motioned Tom away.

'As you cannot suppose,' said Tom, 'that I am here with any view of conciliating you or pleasing myself, I am quite indifferent to your reception of me, or your dismissal of me. Hear what I have to say, if you are not a madman! I gave you a letter the other day, when you were about to go abroad.'

'You Thief, you did!' retorted Jonas. 'I'll pay you for the carriage of it one day, and settle an old score besides. I will!'

'Tut, tut,' said Tom, 'you needn't waste words or threats. I wish you to understand - plainly because I would rather keep clear of you and everything that concerns you: not because I have the least apprehension of your doing me any injury: which would be weak indeed - that I am no party to the contents of that letter. That I know nothing of it. That I was not even aware that it was to be delivered to you; and that I had it from - '

'By the Lord!' cried Jonas, fiercely catching up the chair, 'I'll knock your brains out, if you speak another word.'

Tom, nevertheless, persisting in his intention, and opening his lips to speak again, Jonas set upon him like a savage; and in the quickness and ferocity of his attack would have surely done him some grievous injury, defenceless as he was, and embarrassed by having his

frightened sister clinging to his arm, if Merry had not run between them, crying to Tom for the love of Heaven to leave the house. The agony of this poor creature, the terror of his sister, the impossibility of making himself audible, and the equal impossibility of bearing up against Mrs Gamp, who threw herself upon him like a feather-bed, and forced him backwards down the stairs by the mere oppression of her dead weight, prevailed. Tom shook the dust of that house off his feet, without having mentioned Nadgett's name.

If the name could have passed his lips; if Jonas, in the insolence of his vile nature, had never roused him to do that old act of manliness, for which (and not for his last offence) he hated him with such malignity; if Jonas could have learned, as then he could and would have learned, through Tom's means, what unsuspected spy there was upon him; he would have been saved from the commission of a Guilty Deed, then drawing on towards its black accomplishment. But the fatality was of his own working; the pit was of his own digging; the gloom that gathered round him was the shadow of his own life.

His wife had closed the door, and thrown herself before it, on the ground, upon her knees. She held up her hands to him now, and besought him not to be harsh with her, for she had interposed in fear of bloodshed.

'So, so!' said Jonas, looking down upon her, as he fetched his breath. 'These are your friends, are they, when I am away? You plot and tamper with this sort of people, do you?'

'No, indeed! I have no knowledge of these secrets, and no clue to their meaning. I have never seen him since I left home but once - but twice - before to-day.'

'Oh!' sneered Jonas, catching at this correction. 'But once, but twice, eh? Which do you mean? Twice and once, perhaps. Three times! How many more, you lying jade?'

As he made an angry motion with his hand, she shrunk down hastily. A suggestive action! Full of a cruel truth!

'How many more times?' he repeated.

'No more. The other morning, and to-day, and once besides.'

He was about to retort upon her, when the clock struck. He started stopped, and listened; appearing to revert to some engagement, or to some other subject, a secret within his own breast, recalled to him by this record of the progress of the hours.

'Don't lie there! Get up!'

Having helped her to rise, or rather hauled her up by the arm, he went on to say:

'Listen to me, young lady; and don't whine when you have no occasion, or I may make some for you. If I find him in my house again, or find that you have seen him in anybody else's house, you'll repent it. If you are not deaf and dumb to everything that concerns me, unless you have my leave to hear and speak, you'll repent it. If you don't obey exactly what I order, you'll repent it. Now, attend. What's the time?'

'It struck eight a minute ago.'

He looked towards her intently; and said, with a laboured distinctness, as if he had got the words off by heart:

'I have been travelling day and night, and am tired. I have lost some money, and that don't improve me. Put my supper in the little off-room below, and have the truckle-bed made. I shall sleep there to-night, and maybe to-morrow night; and if I can sleep all day to-morrow, so much the better, for I've got trouble to sleep off, if I can. Keep the house quiet, and don't call me. Mind! Don't call me. Don't let anybody call me. Let me lie there.'

She said it should be done. Was that all?

'All what? You must be prying and questioning!' he angrily retorted. 'What more do you want to know?'

'I want to know nothing, Jonas, but what you tell me. All hope of confidence between us has long deserted me!'

'Ecod, I should hope so!' he muttered.

'But if you will tell me what you wish, I will be obedient and will try to please you. I make no merit of that, for I have no friend in my father or my sister, but am quite alone. I am very humble and submissive. You told me you would break my spirit, and you have done so. Do not break my heart too!'

She ventured, as she said these words, to lay her hand upon his shoulder. He suffered it to rest there, in his exultation; and the whole mean, abject, sordid, pitiful soul of the man, looked at her, for the moment, through his wicked eyes.

For the moment only; for, with the same hurried return to something within himself, he bade her, in a surly tone, show her obedience by executing his commands without delay. When she had withdrawn he paced up and down the room several times; but always with his right hand clenched, as if it held something; which it did not, being empty. When he was tired of this, he threw himself into a chair, and thoughtfully turned up the sleeve of his right arm, as if he were rather musing about its strength than examining it; but, even then, he kept the hand clenched.

He was brooding in this chair, with his eyes cast down upon the ground, when Mrs Gamp came in to tell him that the little room was ready. Not being quite sure of her reception after interfering in the quarrel, Mrs Gamp, as a means of interesting and propitiating her patron, affected a deep solicitude in Mr Chuffey.

'How is he now, sir?' she said.

'Who?' cried Jonas, raising his head, and staring at her.

'To be sure!' returned the matron with a smile and a curtsy. 'What am I thinking of! You wasn't here, sir, when he was took so strange. I never see a poor dear creetur took so strange in all my life, except a patient much about the same age, as I once nussed, which his calling was the custom-'us, and his name was Mrs Harris's own father, as pleasant a singer, Mr Chuzzlewit, as ever you heerd, with a voice like a Jew's-harp in the bass notes, that it took six men to hold at sech times, foaming frightful.'

'Chuffey, eh?' said Jonas carelessly, seeing that she went up to the old, clerk, and looked at him. 'Ha!'

'The creetur's head's so hot,' said Mrs Gamp, 'that you might heat a flat-iron at it. And no wonder I am sure, considerin' the things he said!'

'Said!' cried Jonas. 'What did he say?'

Mrs Gamp laid her hand upon her heart, to put some check upon its palpitations, and turning up her eyes replied in a faint voice:

'The awfulest things, Mr Chuzzlewit, as ever I heerd! Which Mrs Harris's father never spoke a word when took so, some does and some don't, except sayin' when he come round, 'Where is Sairey Gamp?' But raly, sir, when Mr Chuffey comes to ask who's lyin' dead upstairs, and -'

'Who's lying dead upstairs!' repeated Jonas, standing aghast.

Mrs Gamp nodded, made as if she were swallowing, and went on.

'Who's lying dead upstairs; sech was his Bible language; and where was Mr Chuzzlewit as had the only son; and when he goes upstairs a-looking in the beds and wandering about the rooms, and comes down again a-whisperin' softly to his-self about foul play and that; it gives me sech a turn, I don't deny it, Mr Chuzzlewit, that I never could have kep myself up but for a little drain o' spirits, which I seldom touches, but could always wish to know where to find, if so dispoqed, never knowin' wot may happen next, the world bein' so uncertain.'

'Why, the old fool's mad!' cried Jonas, much disturbed.

'That's my opinion, sir,' said Mrs Gamp, 'and I will not deceive you. I believe as Mr Chuffey, sir, rekwires attention (if I may make so bold), and should not have his liberty to wex and worrit your sweet lady as he does.'

'Why, who minds what he says?' retorted Jonas.

'Still he is worritin' sir,' said Mrs Gamp. 'No one don't mind him, but he IS a ill conwenience.'

'Ecod you're right,' said Jonas, looking doubtfully at the subject of this conversation. 'I have half a mind to shut him up.'

Mrs Gamp rubbed her hands, and smiled, and shook her head, and sniffed expressively, as scenting a job.

'Could you - could you take care of such an idiot, now, in some spare room upstairs?' asked Jonas.

'Me and a friend of mine, one off, one on, could do it, Mr Chuzzlewit,' replied the nurse; 'our charges not bein' high, but wishin' they was lower, and allowance made considerin' not strangers. Me and Betsey Prig, sir, would undertake Mr Chuffey reasonable,' said Mrs Gamp, looking at him with her head on one side, as if he had been a piece of goods, for which she was driving a bargain; 'and give every satigefaction. Betsey Prig has nussed a many lunacies, and well she knows their ways, which puttin' 'em right close afore the fire, when fractious, is the certainest and most compoging.'

While Mrs Gamp discoursed to this effect, Jonas was walking up and down the room again, glancing covertly at the old clerk, as he did so. He now made a stop, and said:

'I must look after him, I suppose, or I may have him doing some mischief. What say you?'

'Nothin' more likely!' Mrs Gamp replied. 'As well I have experienged, I do assure you, sir.'

'Well! Look after him for the present, and - let me see - three days from this time let the other woman come here, and we'll see if we can make a bargain of it. About nine or ten o'clock at night, say. Keep your eye upon him in the meanwhile, and don't talk about it. He's as mad as a March hare!'

'Madder!' cried Mrs Gamp. 'A deal madder!'

'See to him, then; take care that he does no harm; and recollect what I have told you.'

Leaving Mrs Gamp in the act of repeating all she had been told, and of producing in support of her memory and trustworthiness, many commendations selected from among the most remarkable opinions of the celebrated Mrs Harris, he descended to the little room prepared for him, and pulling off his coat and his boots, put them outside the door before he locked it. In locking it, he was careful so to adjust the key as to baffle any curious person who might try to peep in through the key-hole; and when he had taken these precautions, he sat down to his supper.

'Mr Chuff,' he muttered, 'it'll be pretty easy to be even with YOU. It's of no use doing things by halves, and as long as I stop here, I'll take good care of you. When I'm off you may say what you please. But it's a d - d strange thing,' he added, pushing away his untouched plate, and striding moodily to and fro, 'that his drivellings should have taken this turn just now.'

After pacing the little room from end to end several times, he sat down in another chair.

'I say just now, but for anything I know, he may have been carrying on the same game all along. Old dog! He shall be gagged!'

He paced the room again in the same restless and unsteady way; and then sat down upon the bedstead, leaning his chin upon his hand, and looking at the table. When he had looked at it for a long time, he remembered his supper; and resuming the chair he had first occupied, began to eat with great rapacity; not like a hungry man, but as if he were determined to do it. He drank too, roundly; sometimes stopping in the middle of a draught to walk, and change his seat and walk again, and dart back to the table and fall to, in a ravenous hurry, as before.

It was now growing dark. As the gloom of evening, deepening into night, came on, another dark shade emerging from within him seemed to overspread his face, and slowly change it. Slowly, slowly; darker and darker; more and more haggard; creeping over him by little and little, until it was black night within him and without.

The room in which he had shut himself up, was on the ground floor, at the back of the house. It was lighted by a dirty skylight, and had a door in the wall, opening into a narrow covered passage or blind-alley, very little frequented after five or six o'clock in the evening, and not in much use as a thoroughfare at any hour. But it had an outlet in a neighbouring street.

The ground on which this chamber stood had, at one time, not within his recollection, been a yard; and had been converted to its present purpose for use as an office. But the occasion for it died with the man who built it; and saving that it had sometimes served as an apology for a spare bedroom, and that the old clerk had once held it (but that was years ago) as his recognized apartment, it had been little troubled by Anthony Chuzzlewit and Son. It was a blotched, stained, mouldering room, like a vault; and there were water-pipes running through it, which at unexpected times in the night, when other things were quiet, clicked and gurgled suddenly, as if they were choking.

The door into the court had not been open for a long, long time; but the key had always hung in one place, and there it hung now. He was prepared for its being rusty; for he had a little bottle of oil in his pocket and the feather of a pen, with which he lubricated the key and the lock too, carefully. All this while he had been without his coat, and had nothing on his feet but his stockings. He now got softly into bed in the same state, and tossed from side to side to tumble it. In his restless condition that was easily done.

When he arose, he took from his portmanteau, which he had caused to be carried into that place when he came home, a pair of clumsy shoes, and put them on his feet; also a pair of leather leggings, such as countrymen are used to wear, with straps to fasten them to the waistband. In these he dressed himself at leisure. Lastly, he took out a common frock of coarse dark jean, which he drew over his own under-clothing; and a felt hat - he had purposely left his own upstairs. He then sat himself down by the door, with the key in his hand, waiting.

He had no light; the time was dreary, long, and awful. The ringers were practicing in a neighbouring church, and the clashing of the bells was almost maddening. Curse the clamouring bells, they seemed to know that he was listening at the door, and to proclaim it in a crowd of voices to all the town! Would they never be still?

They ceased at last, and then the silence was so new and terrible that it seemed the prelude to some dreadful noise. Footsteps in the court! Two men. He fell back from the door on tiptoe, as if they could have seen him through its wooden panels.

They passed on, talking (he could make out) about a skeleton which had been dug up yesterday, in some work of excavation near at hand, and was supposed to be that of a murdered man. 'So murder is not always found out, you see,' they said to one another as they turned the corner.

Hush!

He put the key into the lock, and turned it. The door resisted for a while, but soon came stiffly open; mingling with the sense of fever in his mouth, a taste of rust, and dust, and earth, and rotting wood. He looked out; passed out; locked it after him.

All was clear and quiet, as he fled away.