

Chapter XLVIII

Bears Tidings Of Martin And Of Mark, As Well As Of A Third Person Not Quite Unknown To The Reader. Exhibits Filial Piety In An Ugly Aspect; And Casts A Doubtful Ray Of Light Upon A Very Dark Place

Tom Pinch and Ruth were sitting at their early breakfast, with the window open, and a row of the freshest little plants ranged before it on the inside by Ruth's own hands; and Ruth had fastened a sprig of geranium in Tom's button-hole, to make him very smart and summer-like for the day (it was obliged to be fastened in, or that dear old Tom was certain to lose it); and people were crying flowers up and down the street; and a blundering bee, who had got himself in between the two sashes of the window, was bruising his head against the glass, endeavouring to force himself out into the fine morning, and considering himself enchanted because he couldn't do it; and the morning was as fine a morning as ever was seen; and the fragrant air was kissing Ruth and rustling about Tom, as if it said, 'how are you, my dears; I came all this way on purpose to salute you;' and it was one of those glad times when we form, or ought to form, the wish that every one on earth were able to be happy, and catching glimpses of the summer of the heart, to feel the beauty of the summer of the year.

It was even a pleasanter breakfast than usual; and it was always a pleasant one. For little Ruth had now two pupils to attend, each three times a week; and each two hours at a time; and besides this, she had painted some screens and card-racks, and, unknown to Tom (was there ever anything so delightful!), had walked into a certain shop which dealt in such articles, after often peeping through the window; and had taken courage to ask the Mistress of that shop whether she would buy them. And the mistress had not only bought them, but had ordered more, and that very morning Ruth had made confession of these facts to Tom, and had handed him the money in a little purse she had worked expressly for the purpose. They had been in a flutter about this, and perhaps had shed a happy tear or two for anything the history knows to the contrary; but it was all over now; and a brighter face than Tom's, or a brighter face than Ruth's, the bright sun had not looked on since he went to bed last night.

'My dear girl,' said Tom, coming so abruptly on the subject, that he interrupted himself in the act of cutting a slice of bread, and left the knife sticking in the loaf, 'what a queer fellow our landlord is! I don't believe he has been home once since he got me into that unsatisfactory scrape. I begin to think he will never come home again. What a mysterious life that man does lead, to be sure!'

'Very strange. Is it not, Tom?'

'Really,' said Tom, 'I hope it is only strange. I hope there may be nothing wrong in it. Sometimes I begin to be doubtful of that. I must have an explanation with him,' said Tom, shaking his head as if this were a most tremendous threat, 'when I can catch him!'

A short double knock at the door put Tom's menacing looks to flight, and awakened an expression of surprise instead.

'Heyday!' said Tom. 'An early hour for visitors! It must be John, I suppose.'

'I - I - don't think it was his knock, Tom,' observed his little sister.

'No?' said Tom. 'It surely can't be my employer suddenly arrived in town; directed here by Mr Fips; and come for the key of the office. It's somebody inquiring for me, I declare! Come in, if you please!'

But when the person came in, Tom Pinch, instead of saying, 'Did you wish to speak with me, sir?' or, 'My name is Pinch, sir; what is your business, may I ask?' or addressing him in any such distant terms; cried out, 'Good gracious Heaven!' and seized him by both hands, with the liveliest manifestations of astonishment and pleasure.

The visitor was not less moved than Tom himself, and they shook hands a great many times, without another word being spoken on either side. Tom was the first to find his voice.

'Mark Tapley, too!' said Tom, running towards the door, and shaking hands with somebody else. 'My dear Mark, come in. How are you, Mark? He don't look a day older than he used to do at the Dragon. How ARE you, Mark?'

'Uncommonly jolly, sir, thank'ee,' returned Mr Tapley, all smiles and bows. 'I hope I see you well, sir.'

'Good gracious me!' cried Tom, patting him tenderly on the back. 'How delightful it is to hear his old voice again! My dear Martin, sit down. My sister, Martin. Mr Chuzzlewit, my love. Mark Tapley from the Dragon, my dear. Good gracious me, what a surprise this is! Sit down. Lord, bless me!'

Tom was in such a state of excitement that he couldn't keep himself still for a moment, but was constantly running between Mark and Martin, shaking hands with them alternately, and presenting them over and over again to his sister.

'I remember the day we parted, Martin, as well as if it were yesterday,' said Tom. 'What a day it was! and what a passion you were in! And

don't you remember my overtaking you in the road that morning, Mark, when I was going to Salisbury in the gig to fetch him, and you were looking out for a situation? And don't you recollect the dinner we had at Salisbury, Martin, with John Westlock, eh! Good gracious me! Ruth, my dear, Mr Chuzzlewit. Mark Tapley, my love, from the Dragon. More cups and saucers, if you please. Bless my soul, how glad I am to see you both!

And then Tom (as John Westlock had done on his arrival) ran off to the loaf to cut some bread and butter for them; and before he had spread a single slice, remembered something else, and came running back again to tell it; and then he shook hands with them again; and then he introduced his sister again; and then he did everything he had done already all over again; and nothing Tom could do, and nothing Tom could say, was half sufficient to express his joy at their safe return.

Mr Tapley was the first to resume his composure. In a very short space of time he was discovered to have somehow installed himself in office as waiter, or attendant upon the party; a fact which was first suggested to them by his temporary absence in the kitchen, and speedy return with a kettle of boiling water, from which he replenished the tea-pot with a self-possession that was quite his own.

'Sit down, and take your breakfast, Mark,' said Tom. 'Make him sit down and take his breakfast, Martin.'

'Oh! I gave him up, long ago, as incorrigible,' Martin replied. 'He takes his own way, Tom. You would excuse him, Miss Pinch, if you knew his value.'

'She knows it, bless you!' said Tom. 'I have told her all about Mark Tapley. Have I not, Ruth?'

'Yes, Tom.'

'Not all,' returned Martin, in a low voice. 'The best of Mark Tapley is only known to one man, Tom; and but for Mark he would hardly be alive to tell it!'

'Mark!' said Tom Pinch energetically; 'if you don't sit down this minute, I'll swear at you!'

'Well, sir,' returned Mr Tapley, 'sooner than you should do that, I'll com-ply. It's a considerable invasion of a man's jollity to be made so partickler welcome, but a Werb is a word as signifies to be, to do, or to suffer (which is all the grammar, and enough too, as ever I was

taught); and if there's a Werb alive, I'm it. For I'm always a-bein', sometimes a-doin', and continually a-sufferin'.'

'Not jolly yet?' asked Tom, with a smile.

'Why, I was rather so, over the water, sir,' returned Mr Tapley; 'and not entirely without credit. But Human Natur' is in a conspiracy again' me; I can't get on. I shall have to leave it in my will, sir, to be wrote upon my tomb: 'He was a man as might have come out strong if he could have got a chance. But it was denied him.'

Mr Tapley took this occasion of looking about him with a grin, and subsequently attacking the breakfast, with an appetite not at all expressive of blighted hopes, or insurmountable despondency.

In the meanwhile, Martin drew his chair a little nearer to Tom and his sister, and related to them what had passed at Mr Pecksniff's house; adding in few words a general summary of the distresses and disappointments he had undergone since he left England.

'For your faithful stewardship in the trust I left with you, Tom,' he said, 'and for all your goodness and disinterestedness, I can never thank you enough. When I add Mary's thanks to mine - '

Ah, Tom! The blood retreated from his cheeks, and came rushing back, so violently, that it was pain to feel it; ease though, ease, compared with the aching of his wounded heart.

'When I add Mary's thanks to mine,' said Martin, 'I have made the only poor acknowledgment it is in our power to offer; but if you knew how much we feel, Tom, you would set some store by it, I am sure.'

And if they had known how much Tom felt - but that no human creature ever knew - they would have set some store by him. Indeed they would.

Tom changed the topic of discourse. He was sorry he could not pursue it, as it gave Martin pleasure; but he was unable, at that moment. No drop of envy or bitterness was in his soul; but he could not master the firm utterance of her name.

He inquired what Martin's projects were.

'No longer to make your fortune, Tom,' said Martin, 'but to try to live. I tried that once in London, Tom; and failed. If you will give me the benefit of your advice and friendly counsel, I may succeed better under your guidance. I will do anything Tom, anything, to gain a

livelihood by my own exertions. My hopes do not soar above that, now.'

High-hearted, noble Tom! Sorry to find the pride of his old companion humbled, and to hear him speaking in this altered strain at once, at once, he drove from his breast the inability to contend with its deep emotions, and spoke out bravely.

'Your hopes do not soar above that!' cried Tom. 'Yes they do. How can you talk so! They soar up to the time when you will be happy with her, Martin. They soar up to the time when you will be able to claim her, Martin. They soar up to the time when you will not be able to believe that you were ever cast down in spirit, or poor in pocket, Martin. Advice, and friendly counsel! Why, of course. But you shall have better advice and counsel (though you cannot have more friendly) than mine. You shall consult John Westlock. We'll go there immediately. It is yet so early that I shall have time to take you to his chambers before I go to business; they are in my way; and I can leave you there, to talk over your affairs with him. So come along. Come along. I am a man of occupation now, you know,' said Tom, with his pleasantest smile; 'and have no time to lose. Your hopes don't soar higher than that? I dare say they don't. I know you, pretty well. They'll be soaring out of sight soon, Martin, and leaving all the rest of us leagues behind.'

'Aye! But I may be a little changed,' said Martin, 'since you knew me pretty well, Tom.'

'What nonsense!' exclaimed Tom. 'Why should you be changed? You talk as if you were an old man. I never heard such a fellow! Come to John Westlock's, come. Come along, Mark Tapley. It's Mark's doing, I have no doubt; and it serves you right for having such a grumbler for your companion.'

'There's no credit to be got through being jolly with YOU, Mr Pinch, anyways,' said Mark, with his face all wrinkled up with grins. 'A parish doctor might be jolly with you. There's nothing short of goin' to the U-nited States for a second trip, as would make it at all creditable to be jolly, arter seein' you again!'

Tom laughed, and taking leave of his sister, hurried Mark and Martin out into the street, and away to John Westlock's by the nearest road; for his hour of business was very near at hand, and he prided himself on always being exact to his time.

John Westlock was at home, but, strange to say, was rather embarrassed to see them; and when Tom was about to go into the room where he was breakfasting, said he had a stranger there. It

appeared to be a mysterious stranger, for John shut that door as he said it, and led them into the next room.

He was very much delighted, though, to see Mark Tapley; and received Martin with his own frank courtesy. But Martin felt that he did not inspire John Westlock with any unusual interest; and twice or thrice observed that he looked at Tom Pinch doubtfully; not to say compassionately. He thought, and blushed to think, that he knew the cause of this.

'I apprehend you are engaged,' said Martin, when Tom had announced the purport of their visit. 'If you will allow me to come again at your own time, I shall be glad to do so.'

'I AM engaged,' replied John, with some reluctance; 'but the matter on which I am engaged is one, to say the truth, more immediately demanding your knowledge than mine.'

'Indeed!' cried Martin.

'It relates to a member of your family, and is of a serious nature. If you will have the kindness to remain here, it will be a satisfaction to me to have it privately communicated to you, in order that you may judge of its importance for yourself.'

'And in the meantime,' said Tom, 'I must really take myself off, without any further ceremony.'

'Is your business so very particular,' asked Martin, 'that you cannot remain with us for half an hour? I wish you could. What IS your business, Tom?'

It was Tom's turn to be embarrassed now; but he plainly said, after a little hesitation:

'Why, I am not at liberty to say what it is, Martin; though I hope soon to be in a condition to do so, and am aware of no other reason to prevent my doing so now, than the request of my employer. It's an awkward position to be placed in,' said Tom, with an uneasy sense of seeming to doubt his friend, 'as I feel every day; but I really cannot help it, can I, John?'

John Westlock replied in the negative; and Martin, expressing himself perfectly satisfied, begged them not to say another word; though he could not help wondering very much what curious office Tom held, and why he was so secret, and embarrassed, and unlike himself, in reference to it. Nor could he help reverting to it, in his own mind, several times after Tom went away, which he did as soon as this

conversation was ended, taking Mr Tapley with him, who, as he laughingly said, might accompany him as far as Fleet Street without injury.

'And what do you mean to do, Mark?' asked Tom, as they walked on together.

'Mean to do, sir?' returned Mr Tapley.

'Aye. What course of life do you mean to pursue?'

'Well, sir,' said Mr Tapley. 'The fact is, that I have been a-thinking rather of the matrimonial line, sir.'

'You don't say so, Mark!' cried Tom.

'Yes, sir. I've been a-turnin' of it over.'

'And who is the lady, Mark?'

'The which, sir?' said Mr Tapley.

'The lady. Come! You know what I said,' replied Tom, laughing, 'as well as I do!'

Mr Tapley suppressed his own inclination to laugh; and with one of his most whimsically-twisted looks, replied:

'You couldn't guess, I suppose, Mr Pinch?'

'How is it possible?' said Tom. 'I don't know any of your flames, Mark. Except Mrs Lupin, indeed.'

'Well, sir!' retorted Mr Tapley. 'And supposing it was her!'

Tom stopping in the street to look at him, Mr Tapley for a moment presented to his view an utterly stolid and expressionless face; a perfect dead wall of countenance. But opening window after window in it with astonishing rapidity, and lighting them all up as for a general illumination, he repeated:

'Supposin', for the sake of argument, as it was her, sir!'

'Why I thought such a connection wouldn't suit you, Mark, on any terms!' cried Tom.

'Well, sir! I used to think so myself, once,' said Mark. 'But I ain't so clear about it now. A dear, sweet creetur, sir!'

'A dear, sweet creature? To be sure she is,' cried Tom. 'But she always was a dear, sweet creature, was she not?'

'WAS she not!' assented Mr Tapley.

'Then why on earth didn't you marry her at first, Mark, instead of wandering abroad, and losing all this time, and leaving her alone by herself, liable to be courted by other people?'

'Why, sir,' retorted Mr Tapley, in a spirit of unbounded confidence, 'I'll tell you how it come about. You know me, Mr Pinch, sir; there ain't a gentleman alive as knows me better. You're acquainted with my constitution, and you're acquainted with my weakness. My constitution is, to be jolly; and my weakness is, to wish to find a credit in it. Wery good, sir. In this state of mind, I gets a notion in my head that she looks on me with a eye of - with what you may call a favourable sort of a eye in fact,' said Mr Tapley, with modest hesitation.

'No doubt,' replied Tom. 'We knew that perfectly well when we spoke on this subject long ago; before you left the Dragon.'

Mr Tapley nodded assent. 'Well, sir! But bein' at that time full of hopeful wisions, I arrives at the conclusion that no credit is to be got out of such a way of life as that, where everything agreeable would be ready to one's hand. Lookin' on the bright side of human life in short, one of my hopeful wisions is, that there's a deal of misery awaitin' for me; in the midst of which I may come out tolerable strong, and be jolly under circumstances as reflects some credit. I goes into the world, sir, wery boyant, and I tries this. I goes aboard ship first, and wery soon discovers (by the ease with which I'm jolly, mind you) as there's no credit to be got THERE. I might have took warning by this, and gave it up; but I didn't. I gets to the U-nited States; and then I DO begin, I won't deny it, to feel some little credit in sustaining my spirits. What follows? Jest as I'm a-beginning to come out, and am a-treadin' on the verge, my master deceives me.'

'Deceives you!' cried Tom.

'Swindles me,' retorted Mr Tapley with a beaming face. 'Turns his back on everything as made his service a creditable one, and leaves me high and dry, without a leg to stand upon. In which state I returns home. Wery good. Then all my hopeful wisions bein' crushed; and findin' that there ain't no credit for me nowhere; I abandons myself to despair, and says, 'Let me do that as has the least credit in it of all; marry a dear, sweet creetur, as is wery fond of me; me bein', at the same time, wery fond of her; lead a happy life, and struggle no more again' the blight which settles on my prospects.'

'If your philosophy, Mark,' said Tom, who laughed heartily at this speech, 'be the oddest I ever heard of, it is not the least wise. Mrs Lupin has said 'yes,' of course?'

'Why, no, sir,' replied Mr Tapley; 'she hasn't gone so far as that yet. Which I attribute principally to my not havin' asked her. But we was very agreeable together - comfortable, I may say - the night I come home. It's all right, sir.'

'Well!' said Tom, stopping at the Temple Gate. 'I wish you joy, Mark, with all my heart. I shall see you again to-day, I dare say. Good-bye for the present.'

'Good-bye, sir! Good-bye, Mr Pinch!' he added by way of soliloquy, as he stood looking after him. 'Although you ARE a damper to a honourable ambition. You little think it, but you was the first to dash my hopes. Pecksniff would have built me up for life, but your sweet temper pulled me down. Good-bye, Mr Pinch!'

While these confidences were interchanged between Tom Pinch and Mark, Martin and John Westlock were very differently engaged. They were no sooner left alone together than Martin said, with an effort he could not disguise:

'Mr Westlock, we have met only once before, but you have known Tom a long while, and that seems to render you familiar to me. I cannot talk freely with you on any subject unless I relieve my mind of what oppresses it just now. I see with pain that you so far mistrust me that you think me likely to impose on Tom's regardlessness of himself, or on his kind nature, or some of his good qualities.'

'I had no intention,' replied John, 'of conveying any such impression to you, and am exceedingly sorry to have done so.'

'But you entertain it?' said Martin.

'You ask me so pointedly and directly,' returned the other, 'that I cannot deny the having accustomed myself to regard you as one who, not in wantonness but in mere thoughtlessness of character, did not sufficiently consider his nature and did not quite treat it as it deserves to be treated. It is much easier to slight than to appreciate Tom Pinch.'

This was not said warmly, but was energetically spoken too; for there was no subject in the world (but one) on which the speaker felt so strongly.

'I grew into the knowledge of Tom,' he pursued, 'as I grew towards manhood; and I have learned to love him as something, infinitely

better than myself. I did not think that you understood him when we met before. I did not think that you greatly cared to understand him. The instances of this which I observed in you were, like my opportunities for observation, very trivial - and were very harmless, I dare say. But they were not agreeable to me, and they forced themselves upon me; for I was not upon the watch for them, believe me. You will say,' added John, with a smile, as he subsided into more of his accustomed manner, 'that I am not by any means agreeable to you. I can only assure you, in reply, that I would not have originated this topic on any account.'

'I originated it,' said Martin; 'and so far from having any complaint to make against you, highly esteem the friendship you entertain for Tom, and the very many proofs you have given him of it. Why should I endeavour to conceal from you' - he coloured deeply though - 'that I neither understood him nor cared to understand him when I was his companion; and that I am very truly sorry for it now!'

It was so sincerely said, at once so modestly and manfully, that John offered him his hand as if he had not done so before; and Martin giving his in the same open spirit, all constraint between the young men vanished.

'Now pray,' said John, 'when I tire your patience very much in what I am going to say, recollect that it has an end to it, and that the end is the point of the story.'

With this preface, he related all the circumstances connected with his having presided over the illness and slow recovery of the patient at the Bull; and tacked on to the skirts of that narrative Tom's own account of the business on the wharf. Martin was not a little puzzled when he came to an end, for the two stories seemed to have no connection with each other, and to leave him, as the phrase is, all abroad.

'If you will excuse me for one moment,' said John, rising, 'I will beg you almost immediately to come into the next room.'

Upon that, he left Martin to himself, in a state of considerable astonishment; and soon came back again to fulfil his promise. Accompanying him into the next room, Martin found there a third person; no doubt the stranger of whom his host had spoken when Tom Pinch introduced him.

He was a young man; with deep black hair and eyes. He was gaunt and pale; and evidently had not long recovered from a severe illness. He stood as Martin entered, but sat again at John's desire. His eyes were cast downward; and but for one glance at them both, half in

humiliation and half in entreaty, he kept them so, and sat quite still and silent.

'This person's name is Lewsome,' said John Westlock, 'whom I have mentioned to you as having been seized with an illness at the inn near here, and undergone so much. He has had a very hard time of it, ever since he began to recover; but, as you see, he is now doing well.'

As he did not move or speak, and John Westlock made a pause, Martin, not knowing what to say, said that he was glad to hear it.

'The short statement that I wish you to hear from his own lips, Mr Chuzzlewit,' John pursued - looking attentively at him, and not at Martin - 'he made to me for the first time yesterday, and repeated to me this morning, without the least variation of any essential particular. I have already told you that he informed me before he was removed from the Inn, that he had a secret to disclose to me which lay heavy on his mind. But, fluctuating between sickness and health and between his desire to relieve himself of it, and his dread of involving himself by revealing it, he has, until yesterday, avoided the disclosure. I never pressed him for it (having no idea of its weight or import, or of my right to do so), until within a few days past; when, understanding from him, on his own voluntary avowal, in a letter from the country, that it related to a person whose name was Jonas Chuzzlewit; and thinking that it might throw some light on that little mystery which made Tom anxious now and then; I urged the point upon him, and heard his statement, as you will now, from his own lips. It is due to him to say, that in the apprehension of death, he committed it to writing sometime since, and folded it in a sealed paper, addressed to me; which he could not resolve, however, to place of his own act in my hands. He has the paper in his breast, I believe, at this moment.'

The young man touched it hastily; in corroboration of the fact.

'It will be well to leave that in our charge, perhaps,' said John. 'But do not mind it now.'

As he said this, he held up his hand to bespeak Martin's attention. It was already fixed upon the man before him, who, after a short silence said, in a low, weak, hollow voice:

'What relation was Mr Anthony Chuzzlewit, who - '

' - Who died - to me?' said Martin. 'He was my grandfather's brother.'

'I fear he was made away with. Murdered!'

'My God!' said Martin. 'By whom?'

The young man, Lewsome, looked up in his face, and casting down his eyes again, replied:

'I fear, by me.'

'By you?' cried Martin.

'Not by my act, but I fear by my means.'

'Speak out!' said Martin, 'and speak the truth.'

'I fear this IS the truth.'

Martin was about to interrupt him again, but John Westlock saying softly, 'Let him tell his story in his own way,' Lewsome went on thus:

'I have been bred a surgeon, and for the last few years have served a general practitioner in the City, as his assistant. While I was in his employment I became acquainted with Jonas Chuzzlewit. He is the principal in this deed.'

'What do you mean?' demanded Martin, sternly. 'Do you know he is the son of the old man of whom you have spoken?'

'I do,' he answered.

He remained silent for some moments, when he resumed at the point where he had left off.

'I have reason to know it; for I have often heard him wish his old father dead, and complain of his being wearisome to him, and a drag upon him. He was in the habit of doing so, at a place of meeting we had - three or four of us - at night. There was no good in the place you may suppose, when you hear that he was the chief of the party. I wish I had died myself, and never seen it!'

He stopped again; and again resumed as before.

'We met to drink and game; not for large sums, but for sums that were large to us. He generally won. Whether or no, he lent money at interest to those who lost; and in this way, though I think we all secretly hated him, he came to be the master of us. To propitiate him we made a jest of his father; it began with his debtors; I was one; and we used to toast a quicker journey to the old man, and a swift inheritance to the young one.'

He paused again.

'One night he came there in a very bad humour. He had been greatly tried, he said, by the old man that day. He and I were alone together; and he angrily told me, that the old man was in his second childhood; that he was weak, imbecile, and drivelling; as unbearable to himself as he was to other people; and that it would be a charity to put him out of the way. He swore that he had often thought of mixing something with the stuff he took for his cough, which should help him to die easily. People were sometimes smothered who were bitten by mad dogs, he said; and why not help these lingering old men out of their troubles too? He looked full at me as he said so, and I looked full at him; but it went no farther that night.'

He stopped once more, and was silent for so long an interval that John Westlock said 'Go on.' Martin had never removed his eyes from his face, but was so absorbed in horror and astonishment that he could not speak.

'It may have been a week after that, or it may have been less or more - the matter was in my mind all the time, but I cannot recollect the time, as I should any other period - when he spoke to me again. We were alone then, too; being there before the usual hour of assembling. There was no appointment between us; but I think I went there to meet him, and I know he came there to meet me. He was there first. He was reading a newspaper when I went in, and nodded to me without looking up, or leaving off reading. I sat down opposite and close to him. He said, immediately, that he wanted me to get him some of two sorts of drugs. One that was instantaneous in its effect; of which he wanted very little. One that was slow and not suspicious in appearance; of which he wanted more. While he was speaking to me he still read the newspaper. He said 'Drugs,' and never used any other word. Neither did I.'

'This all agrees with what I have heard before,' observed John Westlock.

'I asked him what he wanted the drugs for? He said for no harm; to physic cats; what did it matter to me? I was going out to a distant colony (I had recently got the appointment, which, as Mr Westlock knows, I have since lost by my sickness, and which was my only hope of salvation from ruin), and what did it matter to me? He could get them without my aid at half a hundred places, but not so easily as he could get them of me. This was true. He might not want them at all, he said, and he had no present idea of using them; but he wished to have them by him. All this time he still read the newspaper. We talked about the price. He was to forgive me a small debt - I was quite in his power - and to pay me five pounds; and there the matter dropped, through others coming in. But, next night, under exactly similar circumstances, I gave him the drugs, on his saying I was a fool to

think that he should ever use them for any harm; and he gave me the money. We have never met since. I only know that the poor old father died soon afterwards, just as he would have died from this cause; and that I have undergone, and suffer now, intolerable misery. Nothing' he added, stretching out his hands, 'can paint my misery! It is well deserved, but nothing can paint it.'

With that he hung his head, and said no more, wasted and wretched, he was not a creature upon whom to heap reproaches that were unavailing.

'Let him remain at hand,' said Martin, turning from him; 'but out of sight, in Heaven's name!'

'He will remain here,' John whispered. 'Come with me!' Softly turning the key upon him as they went out, he conducted Martin into the adjoining room, in which they had been before.

Martin was so amazed, so shocked, and confounded by what he had heard that it was some time before he could reduce it to any order in his mind, or could sufficiently comprehend the bearing of one part upon another, to take in all the details at one view. When he, at length, had the whole narrative clearly before him, John Westlock went on to point out the great probability of the guilt of Jonas being known to other people, who traded in it for their own benefit, and who were, by such means, able to exert that control over him which Tom Pinch had accidentally witnessed, and unconsciously assisted. This appeared so plain, that they agreed upon it without difficulty; but instead of deriving the least assistance from this source, they found that it embarrassed them the more.

They knew nothing of the real parties who possessed this power. The only person before them was Tom's landlord. They had no right to question Tom's landlord, even if they could find him, which, according to Tom's account, it would not be easy to do. And granting that they did question him, and he answered (which was taking a good deal for granted), he had only to say, with reference to the adventure on the wharf, that he had been sent from such and such a place to summon Jonas back on urgent business, and there was an end of it.

Besides, there was the great difficulty and responsibility of moving at all in the matter. Lewsome's story might be false; in his wretched state it might be greatly heightened by a diseased brain; or admitting it to be entirely true, the old man might have died a natural death. Mr Pecksniff had been there at the time; as Tom immediately remembered, when he came back in the afternoon, and shared their counsels; and there had been no secrecy about it. Martin's grandfather was of right the person to decide upon the course that

should be taken; but to get at his views would be impossible, for Mr Pecksniff's views were certain to be his. And the nature of Mr Pecksniff's views in reference to his own son-in-law might be easily reckoned upon.

Apart from these considerations, Martin could not endure the thought of seeming to grasp at this unnatural charge against his relative, and using it as a stepping-stone to his grandfather's favour. But that he would seem to do so, if he presented himself before his grandfather in Mr Pecksniff's house again, for the purpose of declaring it; and that Mr Pecksniff, of all men, would represent his conduct in that despicable light, he perfectly well knew. On the other hand to be in possession of such a statement, and take no measures of further inquiry in reference to it, was tantamount to being a partner in the guilt it professed to disclose.

In a word, they were wholly unable to discover any outlet from this maze of difficulty, which did not lie through some perplexed and entangled thicket. And although Mr Tapley was promptly taken into their confidence; and the fertile imagination of that gentleman suggested many bold expedients, which, to do him justice, he was quite ready to carry into instant operation on his own personal responsibility; still 'bating the general zeal of Mr Tapley's nature, nothing was made particularly clearer by these offers of service.

It was in this position of affairs that Tom's account of the strange behaviour of the decayed clerk, on the night of the tea-party, became of great moment, and finally convinced them that to arrive at a more accurate knowledge of the workings of that old man's mind and memory, would be to take a most important stride in their pursuit of the truth. So, having first satisfied themselves that no communication had ever taken place between Lewsome and Mr Chuffey (which would have accounted at once for any suspicions the latter might entertain), they unanimously resolved that the old clerk was the man they wanted.

But, like the unanimous resolution of a public meeting, which will oftentimes declare that this or that grievance is not to be borne a moment longer, which is nevertheless borne for a century or two afterwards, without any modification, they only reached in this the conclusion that they were all of one mind. For it was one thing to want Mr Chuffey, and another thing to get at him; and to do that without alarming him, or without alarming Jonas, or without being discomfited by the difficulty of striking, in an instrument so out of tune and so unused, the note they sought, was an end as far from their reach as ever.

The question then became, who of those about the old clerk had had most influence with him that night? Tom said his young mistress clearly. But Tom and all of them shrunk from the thought of entrapping her, and making her the innocent means of bringing retribution on her cruel husband. Was there nobody else? Why yes. In a very different way, Tom said, he was influenced by Mrs Gamp, the nurse; who had once had the control of him, as he understood, for some time.

They caught at this immediately. Here was a new way out, developed in a quarter until then overlooked. John Westlock knew Mrs Gamp; he had given her employment; he was acquainted with her place of residence: for that good lady had obligingly furnished him, at parting, with a pack of her professional cards for general distribution. It was decided that Mrs Gamp should be approached with caution, but approached without delay; and that the depths of that discreet matron's knowledge of Mr Chuffey, and means of bringing them, or one of them, into communication with him, should be carefully sounded.

On this service, Martin and John Westlock determined to proceed that night; waiting on Mrs Gamp first, at her lodgings; and taking their chance of finding her in the repose of private life, or of having to seek her out, elsewhere, in the exercise of her professional duties. Tom returned home, that he might lose no opportunity of having an interview with Nadgett, by being absent in the event of his reappearance. And Mr Tapley remained (by his own particular desire) for the time being in Furnival's Inn, to look after Lewsome; who might safely have been left to himself, however, for any thought he seemed to entertain of giving them the slip.

Before they parted on their several errands, they caused him to read aloud, in the presence of them all, the paper which he had about him, and the declaration he had attached to it, which was to the effect that he had written it voluntarily, in the fear of death and in the torture of his mind. And when he had done so, they all signed it, and taking it from him, of his free will, locked it in a place of safety.

Martin also wrote, by John's advice, a letter to the trustees of the famous Grammar School, boldly claiming the successful design as his, and charging Mr Pecksniff with the fraud he had committed. In this proceeding also, John was hotly interested; observing, with his usual irreverence, that Mr Pecksniff had been a successful rascal all his life through, and that it would be a lasting source of happiness to him (John) if he could help to do him justice in the smallest particular.

A busy day! But Martin had no lodgings yet; so when these matters were disposed of, he excused himself from dining with John Westlock

and was fain to wander out alone, and look for some. He succeeded, after great trouble, in engaging two garrets for himself and Mark, situated in a court in the Strand, not far from Temple Bar. Their luggage, which was waiting for them at a coach-office, he conveyed to this new place of refuge; and it was with a glow of satisfaction, which as a selfish man he never could have known and never had, that, thinking how much pains and trouble he had saved Mark, and how pleased and astonished Mark would be, he afterwards walked up and down, in the Temple, eating a meat-pie for his dinner.