

Chapter LII

In Which The Tables Are Turned, Completely Upside Down

Old Martin's cherished projects, so long hidden in his own breast, so frequently in danger of abrupt disclosure through the bursting forth of the indignation he had hoarded up during his residence with Mr Pecksniff, were retarded, but not beyond a few hours, by the occurrences just now related. Stunned, as he had been at first by the intelligence conveyed to him through Tom Pinch and John Westlock, of the supposed manner of his brother's death; overwhelmed as he was by the subsequent narratives of Chuffey and Nadgett, and the forging of that chain of circumstances ending in the death of Jonas, of which catastrophe he was immediately informed; scattered as his purposes and hopes were for the moment, by the crowding in of all these incidents between him and his end; still their very intensity and the tumult of their assemblage nerved him to the rapid and unyielding execution of his scheme. In every single circumstance, whether it were cruel, cowardly, or false, he saw the flowering of the same pregnant seed. Self; grasping, eager, narrow-ranging, overreaching self; with its long train of suspicions, lusts, deceits, and all their growing consequences; was the root of the vile tree. Mr Pecksniff had so presented his character before the old man's eyes, that he - the good, the tolerant, enduring Pecksniff - had become the incarnation of all selfishness and treachery; and the more odious the shapes in which those vices ranged themselves before him now, the sterner consolation he had in his design of setting Mr Pecksniff right and Mr Pecksniff's victims too.

To this work he brought, not only the energy and determination natural to his character (which, as the reader may have observed in the beginning of his or her acquaintance with this gentleman, was remarkable for the strong development of those qualities), but all the forced and unnaturally nurtured energy consequent upon their long suppression. And these two tides of resolution setting into one and sweeping on, became so strong and vigorous, that, to prevent themselves from being carried away before it, Heaven knows where, was as much as John Westlock and Mark Tapley together (though they were tolerably energetic too) could manage to effect.

He had sent for John Westlock immediately on his arrival; and John, under the conduct of Tom Pinch, had waited on him. Having a lively recollection of Mr Tapley, he had caused that gentleman's attendance to be secured, through John's means, without delay; and thus, as we have seen, they had all repaired together to the City. But his grandson he had refused to see until to-morrow, when Mr Tapley was instructed to summon him to the Temple at ten o'clock in the forenoon. Tom he would not allow to be employed in anything, lest he should be

wrongfully suspected; but he was a party to all their proceedings, and was with them until late at night - until after they knew of the death of Jonas; when he went home to tell all these wonders to little Ruth, and to prepare her for accompanying him to the Temple in the morning, agreeably to Mr Chuzzlewit's particular injunction.

It was characteristic of old Martin, and his looking on to something which he had distinctly before him, that he communicated to them nothing of his intentions, beyond such hints of reprisal on Mr Pecksniff as they gathered from the game he had played in that gentleman's house, and the brightening of his eyes whenever his name was mentioned. Even to John Westlock, in whom he was evidently disposed to place great confidence (which may indeed be said of every one of them), he gave no explanation whatever. He merely requested him to return in the morning; and with this for their utmost satisfaction, they left him, when the night was far advanced, alone.

The events of such a day might have worn out the body and spirit of a much younger man than he, but he sat in deep and painful meditation until the morning was bright. Nor did he even then seek any prolonged repose, but merely slumbered in his chair, until seven o'clock, when Mr Tapley had appointed to come to him by his desire; and came - as fresh and clean and cheerful as the morning itself.

'You are punctual,' said Mr Chuzzlewit, opening the door to him in reply to his light knock, which had roused him instantly.

'My wishes, sir,' replied Mr Tapley, whose mind would appear from the context to have been running on the matrimonial service, 'is to love, honour, and obey. The clock's a-striking now, sir.'

'Come in!'

'Thank'ee, sir,' rejoined Mr Tapley, 'what could I do for you first, sir?'

'You gave my message to Martin?' said the old man, bending his eyes upon him.

'I did, sir,' returned Mark; 'and you never see a gentleman more surprised in all your born days than he was.'

'What more did you tell him?' Mr Chuzzlewit inquired.

'Why, sir,' said Mr Tapley, smiling, 'I should have liked to tell him a deal more, but not being able, sir, I didn't tell it him.'

'You told him all you knew?'

'But it was precious little, sir,' retorted Mr Tapley. 'There was very little respectin' you that I was able to tell him, sir. I only mentioned my opinion that Mr Pecksniff would find himself deceived, sir, and that you would find yourself deceived, and that he would find himself deceived, sir.'

'In what?' asked Mr Chuzzlewit.

'Meaning him, sir?'

'Meaning both him and me.'

'Well, sir,' said Mr Tapley. 'In your old opinions of each other. As to him, sir, and his opinions, I know he's a altered man. I know it. I know'd it long afore he spoke to you t'other day, and I must say it. Nobody don't know half as much of him as I do. Nobody can't. There was always a deal of good in him, but a little of it got crusted over, somehow. I can't say who rolled the paste of that 'ere crust myself, but -'

'Go on,' said Martin. 'Why do you stop?'

'But it - well! I beg your pardon, but I think it may have been you, sir. Unintentional I think it may have been you. I don't believe that neither of you gave the other quite a fair chance. There! Now I've got rid on it,' said Mr Tapley in a fit of desperation: 'I can't go a-carryin' it about in my own mind, bustin' myself with it; yesterday was quite long enough. It's out now. I can't help it. I'm sorry for it. Don't wisit on him, sir, that's all.'

It was clear that Mark expected to be ordered out immediately, and was quite prepared to go.

'So you think,' said Martin, 'that his old faults are, in some degree, of my creation, do you?'

'Well, sir,' retorted Mr Tapley, 'I'm werry sorry, but I can't unsay it. It's hardly fair of you, sir, to make a ignorant man convict himself in this way, but I DO think so. I am as respectful disposed to you, sir, as a man can be; but I DO think so.'

The light of a faint smile seemed to break through the dull steadiness of Martin's face, as he looked attentively at him, without replying.

'Yet you are an ignorant man, you say,' he observed after a long pause.

'Werry much so,' Mr Tapley replied.

'And I a learned, well-instructed man, you think?'

'Likewise wery much so,' Mr Tapley answered. The old man, with his chin resting on his hand, paced the room twice or thrice before he added:

'You have left him this morning?'

'Come straight from him now, sir.'

'For what does he suppose?'

'He don't know what to suppose, sir, no more than myself. I told him jest wot passed yesterday, sir, and that you had said to me, 'Can you be here by seven in the morning?' and that you had said to him, through me, 'Can you be here by ten in the morning?' and that I had said 'Yes' to both. That's all, sir.'

His frankness was so genuine that it plainly WAS all.

'Perhaps,' said Martin, 'he may think you are going to desert him, and to serve me?'

'I have served him in that sort of way, sir,' replied Mark, without the loss of any atom of his self-possession; 'and we have been that sort of companions in misfortune, that my opinion is, he don't believe a word on it. No more than you do, sir.'

'Will you help me to dress, and get me some breakfast from the hotel?' asked Martin.

'With pleasure, sir,' said Mark.

'And by-and-bye,' said Martin, 'remaining in the room, as I wish you to do, will you attend to the door yonder - give admission to visitors, I mean, when they knock?'

'Certainly, sir,' said Mr Tapley.

'You will not find it necessary to express surprise at their appearance,' Martin suggested.

'Oh dear no, sir!' said Mr Tapley, 'not at all.'

Although he pledged himself to this with perfect confidence, he was in a state of unbounded astonishment even now. Martin appeared to observe it, and to have some sense of the ludicrous bearing of Mr Tapley under these perplexing circumstances; for, in spite of the

composure of his voice and the gravity of his face, the same indistinct light flickered on the latter several times. Mark bestirred himself, however, to execute the offices with which he was entrusted; and soon lost all tendency to any outward expression of his surprise, in the occupation of being brisk and busy.

But when he had put Mr Chuzzlewit's clothes in good order for dressing, and when that gentleman was dressed and sitting at his breakfast, Mr Tapley's feelings of wonder began to return upon him with great violence; and, standing beside the old man with a napkin under his arm (it was as natural and easy to joke to Mark to be a butler in the Temple, as it had been to volunteer as cook on board the Screw), he found it difficult to resist the temptation of casting sidelong glances at him very often. Nay, he found it impossible; and accordingly yielded to this impulse so often, that Martin caught him in the fact some fifty times. The extraordinary things Mr Tapley did with his own face when any of these detections occurred; the sudden occasions he had to rub his eyes or his nose or his chin; the look of wisdom with which he immediately plunged into the deepest thought, or became intensely interested in the habits and customs of the flies upon the ceiling, or the sparrows out of doors; or the overwhelming politeness with which he endeavoured to hide his confusion by handing the muffin; may not unreasonably be assumed to have exercised the utmost power of feature that even Martin Chuzzlewit the elder possessed.

But he sat perfectly quiet and took his breakfast at his leisure, or made a show of doing so, for he scarcely ate or drank, and frequently lapsed into long intervals of musing. When he had finished, Mark sat down to his breakfast at the same table; and Mr Chuzzlewit, quite silent still, walked up and down the room.

Mark cleared away in due course, and set a chair out for him, in which, as the time drew on towards ten o'clock, he took his seat, leaning his hands upon his stick, and clenching them upon the handle, and resting his chin on them again. All his impatience and abstraction of manner had vanished now; and as he sat there, looking, with his keen eyes, steadily towards the door, Mark could not help thinking what a firm, square, powerful face it was; or exulting in the thought that Mr Pecksniff, after playing a pretty long game of bowls with its owner, seemed to be at last in a very fair way of coming in for a rubber or two.

Mark's uncertainty in respect of what was going to be done or said, and by whom to whom, would have excited him in itself. But knowing for a certainty besides, that young Martin was coming, and in a very few minutes must arrive, he found it by no means easy to remain quiet and silent. But, excepting that he occasionally coughed in a

hollow and unnatural manner to relieve himself, he behaved with great decorum through the longest ten minutes he had ever known.

A knock at the door. Mr Westlock. Mr Tapley, in admitting him, raised his eyebrows to the highest possible pitch, implying thereby that he considered himself in an unsatisfactory position. Mr Chuzzlewit received him very courteously.

Mark waited at the door for Tom Pinch and his sister, who were coming up the stairs. The old man went to meet them; took their hands in his; and kissed her on the cheek. As this looked promising, Mr Tapley smiled benignantly.

Mr Chuzzlewit had resumed his chair before young Martin, who was close behind them, entered. The old man, scarcely looking at him, pointed to a distant seat. This was less encouraging; and Mr Tapley's spirits fell again.

He was quickly summoned to the door by another knock. He did not start, or cry, or tumble down, at sight of Miss Graham and Mrs Lupin, but he drew a very long breath, and came back perfectly resigned, looking on them and on the rest with an expression which seemed to say that nothing could surprise him any more; and that he was rather glad to have done with that sensation for ever.

The old man received Mary no less tenderly than he had received Tom Pinch's sister. A look of friendly recognition passed between himself and Mrs Lupin, which implied the existence of a perfect understanding between them. It engendered no astonishment in Mr Tapley; for, as he afterwards observed, he had retired from the business, and sold off the stock.

Not the least curious feature in this assemblage was, that everybody present was so much surprised and embarrassed by the sight of everybody else, that nobody ventured to speak. Mr Chuzzlewit alone broke silence.

'Set the door open, Mark!' he said; 'and come here.'

Mark obeyed.

The last appointed footstep sounded now upon the stairs. They all knew it. It was Mr Pecksniff's; and Mr Pecksniff was in a hurry too, for he came bounding up with such uncommon expedition that he stumbled twice or thrice.

'Where is my venerable friend?' he cried upon the upper landing; and then with open arms came darting in.

Old Martin merely looked at him; but Mr Pecksniff started back as if he had received the charge from an electric battery.

'My venerable friend is well?' cried Mr Pecksniff.

'Quite well.'

It seemed to reassure the anxious inquirer. He clasped his hands and, looking upwards with a pious joy, silently expressed his gratitude. He then looked round on the assembled group, and shook his head reproachfully. For such a man severely, quite severely.

'Oh, vermin!' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Oh, bloodsuckers! Is it not enough that you have embittered the existence of an individual wholly unparalleled in the biographical records of amiable persons, but must you now, even now, when he has made his election, and reposed his trust in a Numble, but at least sincere and disinterested relative; must you now, vermin and swarmers (I regret to make use of these strong expressions, my dear sir, but there are times when honest indignation will not be controlled), must you now, vermin and swarmers (for I WILL repeat it), take advantage of his unprotected state, assemble round him from all quarters, as wolves and vultures, and other animals of the feathered tribe assemble round - I will not say round carrion or a carcass, for Mr Chuzzlewit is quite the contrary - but round their prey; their prey; to rifle and despoil; gorging their voracious maws, and staining their offensive beaks, with every description of carnivorous enjoyment!'

As he stopped to fetch his breath, he waved them off, in a solemn manner, with his hand.

'Horde of unnatural plunderers and robbers!' he continued; 'leave him! leave him, I say! Begone! Abscond! You had better be off! Wander over the face of the earth, young sirs, like vagabonds as you are, and do not presume to remain in a spot which is hallowed by the grey hairs of the patriarchal gentleman to whose tottering limbs I have the honour to act as an unworthy, but I hope an unassuming, prop and staff. And you, my tender sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, addressing himself in a tone of gentle remonstrance to the old man, 'how could you ever leave me, though even for this short period! You have absented yourself, I do not doubt, upon some act of kindness to me; bless you for it; but you must not do it; you must not be so venturesome. I should really be angry with you if I could, my friend!'

He advanced with outstretched arms to take the old man's hand. But he had not seen how the hand clasped and clutched the stick within its grasp. As he came smiling on, and got within his reach, old Martin, with his burning indignation crowded into one vehement burst, and

flashing out of every line and wrinkle in his face, rose up, and struck him down upon the ground.

With such a well-directed nervous blow, that down he went, as heavily and true as if the charge of a Life-Guardsman had tumbled him out of a saddle. And whether he was stunned by the shock, or only confused by the wonder and novelty of this warm reception, he did not offer to get up again; but lay there, looking about him with a disconcerted meekness in his face so enormously ridiculous, that neither Mark Tapley nor John Westlock could repress a smile, though both were actively interposing to prevent a repetition of the blow; which the old man's gleaming eyes and vigorous attitude seemed to render one of the most probable events in the world.

'Drag him away! Take him out of my reach!' said Martin; 'or I can't help it. The strong restraint I have put upon my hands has been enough to palsy them. I am not master of myself while he is within their range. Drag him away!'

Seeing that he still did not rise, Mr Tapley, without any compromise about it, actually did drag him away, and stick him up on the floor, with his back against the opposite wall.

'Hear me, rascal!' said Mr Chuzzlewit. 'I have summoned you here to witness your own work. I have summoned you here to witness it, because I know it will be gall and wormwood to you! I have summoned you here to witness it, because I know the sight of everybody here must be a dagger in your mean, false heart! What! do you know me as I am, at last!'

Mr Pecksniff had cause to stare at him, for the triumph in his face and speech and figure was a sight to stare at.

'Look there!' said the old man, pointing at him, and appealing to the rest. 'Look there! And then - come hither, my dear Martin - look here! here! here!' At every repetition of the word he pressed his grandson closer to his breast.

'The passion I felt, Martin, when I dared not do this,' he said, 'was in the blow I struck just now. Why did we ever part! How could we ever part! How could you ever fly from me to him!'

Martin was about to answer, but he stopped him, and went on.

'The fault was mine no less than yours. Mark has told me so today, and I have known it long; though not so long as I might have done. Mary, my love, come here.'

As she trembled and was very pale, he sat her in his own chair, and stood beside it with her hand in his; and Martin standing by him.

'The curse of our house,' said the old man, looking kindly down upon her, 'has been the love of self; has ever been the love of self. How often have I said so, when I never knew that I had wrought it upon others.'

He drew one hand through Martin's arm, and standing so, between them, proceeded thus:

'You all know how I bred this orphan up, to tend me. None of you can know by what degrees I have come to regard her as a daughter; for she has won upon me, by her self-forgetfulness, her tenderness, her patience, all the goodness of her nature, when Heaven is her witness that I took but little pains to draw it forth. It blossomed without cultivation, and it ripened without heat. I cannot find it in my heart to say that I am sorry for it now, or yonder fellow might be holding up his head.'

Mr Pecksniff put his hand into his waistcoat, and slightly shook that part of him to which allusion had been made; as if to signify that it was still uppermost.

'There is a kind of selfishness,' said Martin - 'I have learned it in my own experience of my own breast - which is constantly upon the watch for selfishness in others; and holding others at a distance, by suspicions and distrusts, wonders why they don't approach, and don't confide, and calls that selfishness in them. Thus I once doubted those about me - not without reason in the beginning - and thus I once doubted you, Martin.'

'Not without reason,' Martin answered, 'either.'

'Listen, hypocrite! Listen, smooth-tongued, servile, crawling knave!' said Martin. 'Listen, you shallow dog. What! When I was seeking him, you had already spread your nets; you were already fishing for him, were ye? When I lay ill in this good woman's house and your meek spirit pleaded for my grandson, you had already caught him, had ye? Counting on the restoration of the love you knew I bore him, you designed him for one of your two daughters did ye? Or failing that, you traded in him as a speculation which at any rate should blind me with the lustre of your charity, and found a claim upon me! Why, even then I knew you, and I told you so. Did I tell you that I knew you, even then?'

'I am not angry, sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, softly. 'I can bear a great deal from you. I will never contradict you, Mr Chuzzlewit.'

'Observe!' said Martin, looking round. 'I put myself in that man's hands on terms as mean and base, and as degrading to himself, as I could render them in words. I stated them at length to him, before his own children, syllable by syllable, as coarsely as I could, and with as much offence, and with as plain an exposition of my contempt, as words - not looks and manner merely - could convey. If I had only called the angry blood into his face, I would have wavered in my purpose. If I had only stung him into being a man for a minute I would have abandoned it. If he had offered me one word of remonstrance, in favour of the grandson whom he supposed I had disinherited; if he had pleaded with me, though never so faintly, against my appeal to him to abandon him to misery and cast him from his house; I think I could have borne with him for ever afterwards. But not a word, not a word. Pandering to the worst of human passions was the office of his nature; and faithfully he did his work!'

'I am not angry,' observed Mr Pecksniff. 'I am hurt, Mr Chuzzlewit; wounded in my feelings; but I am not angry, my good sir.'

Mr Chuzzlewit resumed.

'Once resolved to try him, I was resolute to pursue the trial to the end; but while I was bent on fathoming the depth of his duplicity, I made a sacred compact with myself that I would give him credit on the other side for any latent spark of goodness, honour, forbearance - any virtue - that might glimmer in him. For first to last there has been no such thing. Not once. He cannot say I have not given him opportunity. He cannot say I have ever led him on. He cannot say I have not left him freely to himself in all things; or that I have not been a passive instrument in his hands, which he might have used for good as easily as evil. Or if he can, he Lies! And that's his nature, too.'

'Mr Chuzzlewit,' interrupted Pecksniff, shedding tears. 'I am not angry, sir. I cannot be angry with you. But did you never, my dear sir, express a desire that the unnatural young man who by his wicked arts has estranged your good opinion from me, for the time being; only for the time being; that your grandson, Mr Chuzzlewit, should be dismissed my house? Recollect yourself, my Christian friend.'

'I have said so, have I not?' retorted the old man, sternly. 'I could not tell how far your specious hypocrisy had deceived him, knave; and knew no better way of opening his eyes than by presenting you before him in your own servile character. Yes. I did express that desire. And you leaped to meet it; and you met it; and turning in an instant on the hand you had licked and beslavered, as only such hounds can, you strengthened, and confirmed, and justified me in my scheme.'

Mr Pecksniff made a bow; a submissive, not to say a grovelling and an abject bow. If he had been complimented on his practice of the loftiest virtues, he never could have bowed as he bowed then.

'The wretched man who has been murdered,' Mr Chuzzlewit went on to say; 'then passing by the name of - '

'Tigg,' suggested Mark.

'Of Tigg; brought begging messages to me on behalf of a friend of his, and an unworthy relative of mine; and finding him a man well enough suited to my purpose, I employed him to glean some news of you, Martin, for me. It was from him I learned that you had taken up your abode with yonder fellow. It was he, who meeting you here in town, one evening - you remember where?'

'At the pawnbroker's shop,' said Martin.

'Yes; watched you to your lodging, and enabled me to send you a bank-note.'

'I little thought,' said Martin, greatly moved, 'that it had come from you; I little thought that you were interested in my fate. If I had - '

'If you had,' returned the old man, sorrowfully, 'you would have shown less knowledge of me as I seemed to be, and as I really was. I hoped to bring you back, Martin, penitent and humbled. I hoped to distress you into coming back to me. Much as I loved you, I had that to acknowledge which I could not reconcile it to myself to avow, then, unless you made submission to me first. Thus it was I lost you. If I have had, indirectly, any act or part in the fate of that unhappy man, by putting means, however small, within his reach, Heaven forgive me! I might have known, perhaps, that he would misuse money; that it was ill-bestowed upon him; and that sown by his hands it could engender mischief only. But I never thought of him at that time as having the disposition or ability to be a serious impostor, or otherwise than as a thoughtless, idle-humoured, dissipated spendthrift, sinning more against himself than others, and frequenting low haunts and indulging vicious tastes, to his own ruin only.'

'Beggin' your pardon, sir,' said Mr Tapley, who had Mrs Lupin on his arm by this time, quite agreeably; 'if I may make so bold as say so, my opinion is, as you was quite correct, and that he turned out perfectly nat'ral for all that. There's surprisin' number of men sir, who as long as they've only got their own shoes and stockings to depend upon, will walk down hill, along the gutters quiet enough and by themselves, and not do much harm. But set any on 'em up with a coach and horses, sir; and it's wonderful what a knowledge of drivin' he'll show,

and how he'll fill his vehicle with passengers, and start off in the middle of the road, neck or nothing, to the Devil! Bless your heart, sir, there's ever so many Tiggs a-passin' this here Temple-gate any hour in the day, that only want a chance to turn out full-blown Montagues every one!

'Your ignorance, as you call it, Mark,' said Mr Chuzzlewit, 'is wiser than some men's enlightenment, and mine among them. You are right; not for the first time to-day. Now hear me out, my dears. And hear me, you, who, if what I have been told be accurately stated, are Bankrupt in pocket no less than in good name! And when you have heard me, leave this place, and poison my sight no more!'

Mr Pecksniff laid his hand upon his breast, and bowed again.

'The penance I have done in this house,' said Mr Chuzzlewit, 'has earned this reflection with it constantly, above all others. That if it had pleased Heaven to visit such infirmity on my old age as really had reduced me to the state in which I feigned to be, I should have brought its misery upon myself. Oh, you whose wealth, like mine, has been a source of continual unhappiness, leading you to distrust the nearest and dearest, and to dig yourself a living grave of suspicion and reserve; take heed that, having cast off all whom you might have bound to you, and tenderly, you do not become in your decay the instrument of such a man as this, and waken in another world to the knowledge of such wrong as would embitter Heaven itself, if wrong or you could ever reach it!'

And then he told them how he had sometimes thought, in the beginning, that love might grow up between Mary and Martin; and how he had pleased his fancy with the picture of observing it when it was new, and taking them to task, apart, in counterfeited doubt, and then confessing to them that it had been an object dear to his heart; and by his sympathy with them, and generous provision for their young fortunes, establishing a claim on their affection and regard which nothing should wither, and which should surround his old age with means of happiness. How in the first dawn of this design, and when the pleasure of such a scheme for the happiness of others was new and indistinct within him, Martin had come to tell him that he had already chosen for himself; knowing that he, the old man, had some faint project on that head, but ignorant whom it concerned. How it was little comfort to him to know that Martin had chosen Her, because the grace of his design was lost, and because finding that she had returned his love, he tortured himself with the reflection that they, so young, to whom he had been so kind a benefactor, were already like the world, and bent on their own selfish, stealthy ends. How in the bitterness of this impression, and of his past experience, he had reproached Martin so harshly (forgetting that he had never

invited his confidence on such a point, and confounding what he had meant to do with what he had done), that high words sprung up between them, and they separated in wrath. How he loved him still, and hoped he would return. How on the night of his illness at the Dragon, he had secretly written tenderly of him, and made him his heir, and sanctioned his marriage with Mary; and how, after his interview with Mr Pecksniff, he had distrusted him again, and burnt the paper to ashes, and had lain down in his bed distracted by suspicions, doubts, and regrets.

And then he told them how, resolved to probe this Pecksniff, and to prove the constancy and truth of Mary (to himself no less than Martin), he had conceived and entered on his plan; and how, beneath her gentleness and patience, he had softened more and more; still more and more beneath the goodness and simplicity, the honour and the manly faith of Tom. And when he spoke of Tom, he said God bless him; and the tears were in his eyes; for he said that Tom, mistrusted and disliked by him at first, had come like summer rain upon his heart; and had disposed it to believe in better things. And Martin took him by the hand, and Mary too, and John, his old friend, stoutly too; and Mark, and Mrs Lupin, and his sister, little Ruth. And peace of mind, deep, tranquil peace of mind, was in Tom's heart.

The old man then related how nobly Mr Pecksniff had performed the duty in which he stood indebted to society, in the matter of Tom's dismissal; and how, having often heard disparagement of Mr Westlock from Pecksniffian lips, and knowing him to be a friend to Tom, he had used, through his confidential agent and solicitor, that little artifice which had kept him in readiness to receive his unknown friend in London. And he called on Mr Pecksniff (by the name of Scoundrel) to remember that there again he had not trapped him to do evil, but that he had done it of his own free will and agency; nay, that he had cautioned him against it. And once again he called on Mr Pecksniff (by the name of Hang-dog) to remember that when Martin coming home at last, an altered man, had sued for the forgiveness which awaited him, he, Pecksniff, had rejected him in language of his own, and had remorsefully stepped in between him and the least touch of natural tenderness. 'For which,' said the old man, 'if the bending of my finger would remove a halter from your neck, I wouldn't bend it!'

'Martin,' he added, 'your rival has not been a dangerous one, but Mrs Lupin here has played duenna for some weeks; not so much to watch your love as to watch her lover. For that Ghoul' - his fertility in finding names for Mr Pecksniff was astonishing - 'would have crawled into her daily walks otherwise, and polluted the fresh air. What's this? Her hand is trembling strangely. See if you can hold it.'

Hold it! If he clasped it half as tightly as he did her waist. Well, well!

But it was good in him that even then, in his high fortune and happiness, with her lips nearly printed on his own, and her proud young beauty in his close embrace, he had a hand still left to stretch out to Tom Pinch.

'Oh, Tom! Dear Tom! I saw you, accidentally, coming here. Forgive me!'

'Forgive!' cried Tom. 'I'll never forgive you as long as I live, Martin, if you say another syllable about it. Joy to you both! Joy, my dear fellow, fifty thousand times.'

Joy! There is not a blessing on earth that Tom did not wish them. There is not a blessing on earth that Tom would not have bestowed upon them, if he could.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Mr Tapley, stepping forward, 'but yow was mentionin', just now, a lady of the name of Lupin, sir.'

'I was,' returned old Martin

'Yes, sir. It's a pretty name, sir?'

'A very good name,' said Martin.

'It seems a'most a pity to change such a name into Tapley. Don't it, sir?' said Mark.

'That depends upon the lady. What is HER opinion?'

'Why, sir,' said Mr Tapley, retiring, with a bow, towards the buxom hostess, 'her opinion is as the name ain't a change for the better, but the individual may be, and, therefore, if nobody ain't acquainted with no jest cause or impediment, et cetera, the Blue Dragon will be converted into the Jolly Tapley. A sign of my own invention, sir. Wery new, conwivial, and expressive!'

The whole of these proceedings were so agreeable to Mr Pecksniff that he stood with his eyes fixed upon the floor and his hands clasping one another alternately, as if a host of penal sentences were being passed upon him. Not only did his figure appear to have shrunk, but his discomfiture seemed to have extended itself even to his dress. His clothes seemed to have grown shabbier, his linen to have turned yellow, his hair to have become lank and frowsy; his very boots looked villanous and dim, as if their gloss had departed with his own.

Feeling, rather than seeing, that the old man now pointed to the door, he raised his eyes, picked up his hat, and thus addressed him:

'Mr Chuzzlewit, sir! you have partaken of my hospitality.'

'And paid for it,' he observed.

'Thank you. That savours,' said Mr Pecksniff, taking out his pocket-handkerchief, 'of your old familiar frankness. You have paid for it. I was about to make the remark. You have deceived me, sir. Thank you again. I am glad of it. To see you in the possession of your health and faculties on any terms, is, in itself, a sufficient recompense. To have been deceived implies a trusting nature. Mine is a trusting nature. I am thankful for it. I would rather have a trusting nature, do you know, sir, than a doubting one!'

Here Mr Pecksniff, with a sad smile, bowed, and wiped his eyes.

'There is hardly any person present, Mr Chuzzlewit,' said Pecksniff, 'by whom I have not been deceived. I have forgiven those persons on the spot. That was my duty; and, of course, I have done it. Whether it was worthy of you to partake of my hospitality, and to act the part you did act in my house, that, sir, is a question which I leave to your own conscience. And your conscience does not acquit you. No, sir, no!'

Pronouncing these last words in a loud and solemn voice, Mr Pecksniff was not so absolutely lost in his own fervour as to be unmindful of the expediency of getting a little nearer to the door.

'I have been struck this day,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'with a walking stick (which I have every reason to believe has knobs upon it), on that delicate and exquisite portion of the human anatomy - the brain. Several blows have been inflicted, sir, without a walking-stick, upon that tenderer portion of my frame - my heart. You have mentioned, sir, my being bankrupt in my purse. Yes, sir, I am. By an unfortunate speculation, combined with treachery, I find myself reduced to poverty; at a time, sir, when the child of my bosom is widowed, and affliction and disgrace are in my family.'

Here Mr Pecksniff wiped his eyes again, and gave himself two or three little knocks upon the breast, as if he were answering two or three other little knocks from within, given by the tinkling hammer of his conscience, to express 'Cheer up, my boy!'

'I know the human mind, although I trust it. That is my weakness. Do I not know, sir' - here he became exceedingly plaintive and was observed to glance towards Tom Pinch - 'that my misfortunes bring this treatment on me? Do I not know, sir, that but for them I never should have heard what I have heard to-day? Do I not know that in the silence and the solitude of night, a little voice will whisper in your ear, Mr Chuzzlewit, 'This was not well. This was not well, sir!' Think of

this, sir (if you will have the goodness), remote from the impulses of passion, and apart from the specialities, if I may use that strong remark, of prejudice. And if you ever contemplate the silent tomb, sir, which you will excuse me for entertaining some doubt of your doing, after the conduct into which you have allowed yourself to be betrayed this day; if you ever contemplate the silent tomb sir, think of me. If you find yourself approaching to the silent tomb, sir, think of me. If you should wish to have anything inscribed upon your silent tomb, sir, let it be, that I - ah, my remorseful sir! that I - the humble individual who has now the honour of reproaching you, forgave you. That I forgave you when my injuries were fresh, and when my bosom was newly wrung. It may be bitterness to you to hear it now, sir, but you will live to seek a consolation in it. May you find a consolation in it when you want it, sir! Good morning!

With this sublime address, Mr Pecksniff departed. But the effect of his departure was much impaired by his being immediately afterwards run against, and nearly knocked down, by a monstrosly excited little man in velveteen shorts and a very tall hat; who came bursting up the stairs, and straight into the chambers of Mr Chuzzlewit, as if he were deranged.

'Is there anybody here that knows him?' cried the little man. 'Is there anybody here that knows him? Oh, my stars, is there anybody here that knows him?'

They looked at each other for an explanation; but nobody knew anything more than that here was an excited little man with a very tall hat on, running in and out of the room as hard as he could go; making his single pair of bright blue stockings appear at least a dozen; and constantly repeating in a shrill voice, 'IS there anybody here that knows him?'

'If your brains is not turned topjy turjey, Mr Sweedlepipes!' exclaimed another voice, 'hold that there nige of yourn, I beg you, sir.'

At the same time Mrs Gamp was seen in the doorway; out of breath from coming up so many stairs, and panting fearfully; but dropping curtseys to the last.

'Excuse the weakness of the man,' said Mrs Gamp, eyeing Mr Sweedlepipe with great indignation; 'and well I might expect it, as I should have know'd, and wishin' he was drowned in the Thames afore I had brought him here, which not a blessed hour ago he nearly shaved the noge off from the father of as lovely a family as ever, Mr Chuzzlewit, was born three sets of twins, and would have done it, only he see it a-goin' in the glass, and dodged the rager. And never, Mr Sweedlepipes, I do assure you, sir, did I so well know what a

misfortun it was to be acquainted with you, as now I do, which so I say, sir, and I don't deceive you!

'I ask your pardon, ladies and gentlemen all,' cried the little barber, taking off his hat, 'and yours too, Mrs Gamp. But - but,' he added this half laughing and half crying, 'IS there anybody here that knows him?'

As the barber said these words, a something in top-boots, with its head bandaged up, staggered into the room, and began going round and round and round, apparently under the impression that it was walking straight forward.

'Look at him!' cried the excited little barber. 'Here he is! That'll soon wear off, and then he'll be all right again. He's no more dead than I am. He's all alive and hearty. Aint you, Bailey?'

'R - r - reether so, Poll!' replied that gentleman.

'Look here!' cried the little barber, laughing and crying in the same breath. 'When I steady him he comes all right. There! He's all right now. Nothing's the matter with him now, except that he's a little shook and rather giddy; is there, Bailey?'

'R - r - reether shook, Poll - reether so!' said Mr Bailey. 'What, my lovely Sairey! There you air!'

'What a boy he is!' cried the tender-hearted Poll, actually sobbing over him. 'I never see sech a boy! It's all his fun. He's full of it. He shall go into the business along with me. I am determind he shall. We'll make it Sweedlepipe and Bailey. He shall have the sporting branch (what a one he'll be for the matches!) and me the shavin'. I'll make over the birds to him as soon as ever he's well enough. He shall have the little bullfinch in the shop, and all. He's sech a boy! I ask your pardon, ladies and gentlemen, but I thought there might be some one here that know'd him!'

Mrs Gamp had observed, not without jealousy and scorn, that a favourable impression appeared to exist in behalf of Mr Sweedlepipe and his young friend; and that she had fallen rather into the background in consequence. She now struggled to the front, therefore, and stated her business.

'Which, Mr Chuzzlewit,' she said, 'is well beknown to Mrs Harris as has one sweet infant (though she DO not wish it known) in her own family by the mother's side, kep in spirits in a bottle; and that sweet babe she see at Greenwich Fair, a-travelling in company with a pink-eyed lady, Prooshan dwarf, and livin' skelinton, which judge her feelings when the barrel organ played, and she was showed her own

dear sister's child, the same not bein' expected from the outside picter, where it was painted quite contrairy in a livin' state, a many sizes larger, and performing beautiful upon the Arp, which never did that dear child know or do; since breathe it never did, to speak on in this wale! And Mrs Harris, Mr Chuzzlewit, has knowed me many year, and can give you information that the lady which is widedered can't do better and may do worse, than let me wait upon her, which I hope to do. Permittin' the sweet faces as I see afore me.'

'Oh!' said Mr Chuzzlewit. 'Is that your business? Was this good person paid for the trouble we gave her?'

'I paid her, sir,' returned Mark Tapley; 'liberal.'

'The young man's words is true,' said Mrs Gamp, 'and thank you kindly.'

'Then here we will close our acquaintance, Mrs Gamp,' retorted Mr Chuzzlewit. 'And Mr Sweedlepipe - is that your name?'

'That is my name, sir,' replied Poll, accepting with a profusion of gratitude, some chinking pieces which the old man slipped into his hand.

'Mr Sweedlepipe, take as much care of your lady-lodger as you can, and give her a word or two of good advice now and then. Such,' said old Martin, looking gravely at the astonished Mrs Gamp, 'as hinting at the expediency of a little less liquor, and a little more humanity, and a little less regard for herself, and a little more regard for her patients, and perhaps a trifle of additional honesty. Or when Mrs Gamp gets into trouble, Mr Sweedlepipe, it had better not be at a time when I am near enough to the Old Bailey to volunteer myself as a witness to her character. Endeavour to impress that upon her at your leisure, if you please.'

Mrs Gamp clasped her hands, turned up her eyes until they were quite invisible, threw back her bonnet for the admission of fresh air to her heated brow; and in the act of saying faintly - 'Less liquor! - Sairey Gamp - Bottle on the chimney-piece, and let me put my lips to it, when I am so dispoed!' - fell into one of the walking swoons; in which pitiable state she was conducted forth by Mr Sweedlepipe, who, between his two patients, the swooning Mrs Gamp and the revolving Bailey, had enough to do, poor fellow.

The old man looked about him, with a smile, until his eyes rested on Tom Pinch's sister; when he smiled the more.

'We will all dine here together,' he said; 'and as you and Mary have enough to talk of, Martin, you shall keep house for us until the afternoon, with Mr and Mrs Tapley. I must see your lodgings in the meanwhile, Tom.'

Tom was quite delighted. So was Ruth. She would go with them.

'Thank you, my love,' said Mr Chuzzlewit. 'But I am afraid I must take Tom a little out of the way, on business. Suppose you go on first, my dear?'

Pretty little Ruth was equally delighted to do that.

'But not alone,' said Martin, 'not alone. Mr Westlock, I dare say, will escort you.'

Why, of course he would: what else had Mr Westlock in his mind? How dull these old men are!

'You are sure you have no engagement?' he persisted.

Engagement! As if he could have any engagement!

So they went off arm-in-arm. When Tom and Mr Chuzzlewit went off arm-in-arm a few minutes after them, the latter was still smiling; and really, for a gentleman of his habits, in rather a knowing manner.