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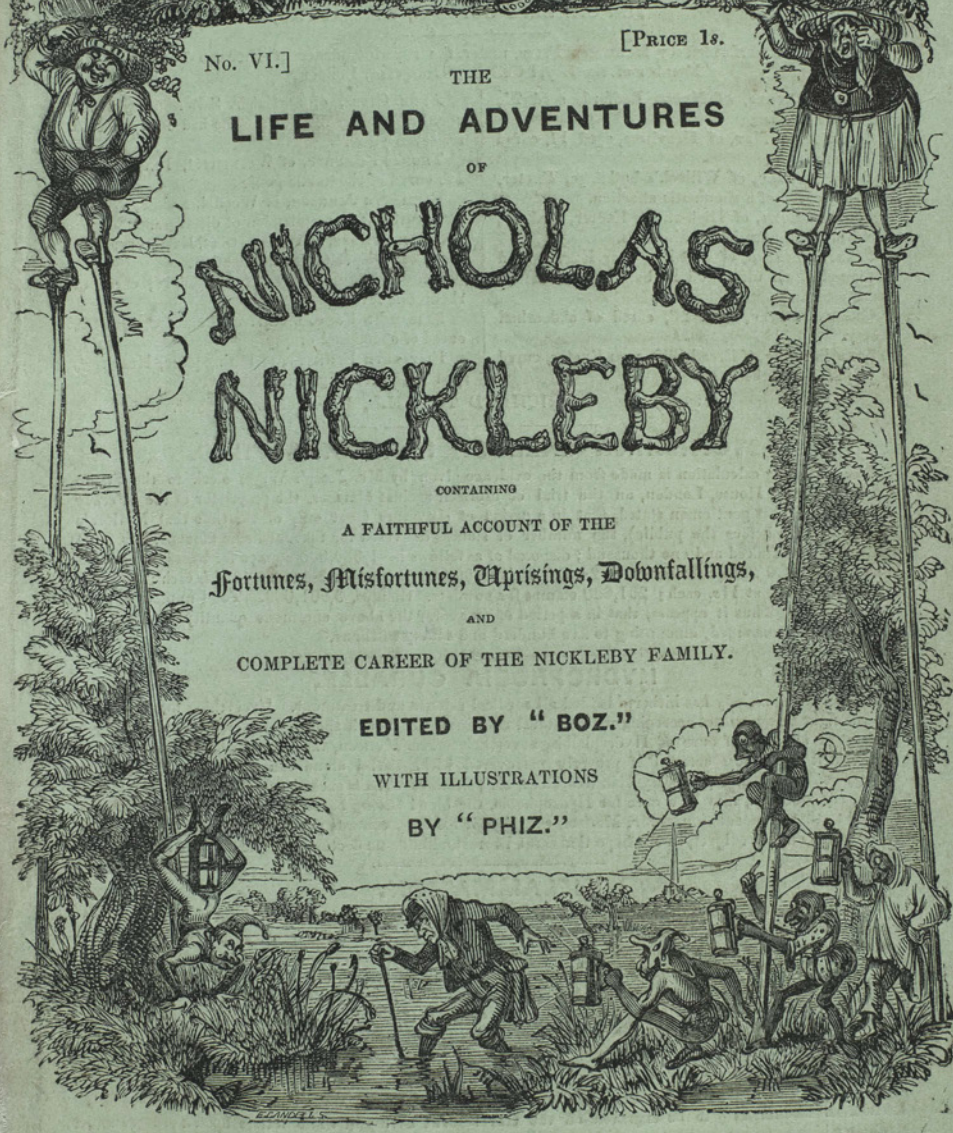
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LIFE AND ADVENTURES  
OF

# NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

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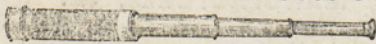
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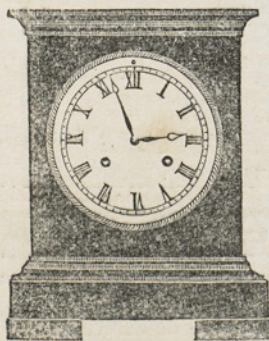
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W. P. has a grate expressly made for the Cure of Smoky Chimneys, and will guarantee its success. He invites attention to his Improved Method of Heating with Hot Water; also to the Domestic Pure Warm-Air Safety Stove, for Churches, Mansions, Houses, Galleries, Entrance-Halls, &c., with Pure Air, which may be seen in daily use at his Show Rooms and Manufactory, as well as an extensive assortment of Fenders, Fire-Irons, Ranges, Boilers, Patent Smoke-Jacks, Hot Plates, Broiling Plates, and all other articles of Kitchen requisites, with the latest Improvements. Baths of every Description, viz., Hot, Cold, Vapour, Douches, Shower, Leg, and Sponge; also Jekyll's Portable Baths.

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"This phenomenon, so commonly observed and commented upon at this season of the year, but seldom suggests any other train of ideas than the ordinary one of its resemblance to the decline of life. It seems not to be generally understood, that the human being is subject to the same laws as those which govern the vegetable creation in the *Fall of the Leaf*. The present is found from experience and accurate observation to be the season when weak hair most rapidly falls off, and hair of strong luxuriant growth becomes relaxed—these evils, though long known to the medical world, were yet without a remedy till the discovery of the BALM OF COLUMBIA by OLDRIDGE—the introduction of which, as a powerful strengthener and preserver of the hair, has created an era in the annals of remedial agents, and from its unfailing effects in cases of baldness, has stamped it as one of the most important modern discoveries."

OLDRIDGE'S BALM causes whiskers and eyebrows to grow, prevents the Hair from turning grey, and the first application makes it curl beautifully, frees it from scurf, and stops the hair from falling off. Abundance of certificates from gentlemen of the first respectability are shown by the Proprietors, C. and A. OLDRIDGE, 1, Wellington Street, Strand, where the Balm is sold, price 3s. 6d., 6s., and 11s. per bottle. No other prices are genuine.

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Respectfully invites the attention of the Nobility, Gentry, and Public, to his extensive Stock of Ready-made Linen. R. K. rests his claim for patronage upon superior quality and style, at the most moderate prices.

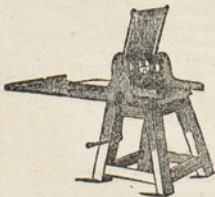
Where despatch is required, Gentlemen can be supplied with Ready-made Linen or India Cloth Shirts, of any size or quality, washed and ready for immediate use, at the following scale of prices:—

India Cloth .. ..	.. £1 16 0 per doz.	Stout Linen .. ..	.. 8 6 each.
Do. with Linen Fronts, } .. 3 0 0 ..		Do. Fine Fronts .. ..	.. 9 6 ..
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The above articles made to order on the shortest possible notice.

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**DR. JOHN ARMSTRONG'S LIVER PILLS.**

"I care not how I am physicked, so it be not by the adventure of a quack, but advice of a physician, who, I am sure, will prescribe no more for me than may consist with my safety, and need doth require."—Old Divine.

**THESE LIVER PILLS** have now established themselves as a favourite FAMILY APERIENT, as a safe and sure Destroyer of WORMS in Children, as a most effectual remedy for an INACTIVE LIVER, and, consequently, as an ANTIBILIOUS. Obstinate sores heal, and the STONE and GRAVEL are invariably cured, under a course of them. The occasional use of these PILLS, instead of any other Aperient, renders the COMPLEXION beautifully clear, and free from Eruptions. Many DROPSICAL persons are now never without these Pills. Taken a few nights before a VOYAGE, they prevent SEA-SICKNESS. They contain no Aloes, Gamboge, or Colocynth; occasioning no Pains, nor any pain in their operation.

By permission of the Board of Stamps and Taxes at Somerset-House, the Proprietor has had the NAME of his invaluable Medicine, "Dr. John Armstrong's Liver Pills," engraved in WHITE LETTERS on the Government Stamp, to which he continues to affix, in red wax, his coat of arms, a Tower on a Shield of ermine and gold.

The LIVER PILLS are now prepared only by the Proprietor's new Compounding Agents, EDW. WINSTANLEY and Son, 7, POULTRY, LONDON, in the stead of John T. Eddy, of Bishop-Stortford, who ceased to be the Proprietor's Agent on the 9th Feb. 1838, but continues, he, his heirs, administrators, and assigns, by virtue of an agreement, duly stamped and executed, bearing date Oct. 7th, 1837, liable to a penalty of 500l. if he or they ever divulge the secret of the Prescription, or again prepare the Pills, or sell any other Pills of his or their preparing, under the name of Dr. John Armstrong's Liver Pills.

The Trade is informed that the Proprietor, a Gentleman of private fortune, has directed his new Agents to put thirteen boxes into every dozen-packet, and that the 1s. 1/4d. size only will now be prepared. Messrs. Winstanley are to supply only the London Wholesale Houses; to whom, therefore, Retailers are requested to address their orders.

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**SIGNOR LANZA, SINGING MASTER,** the cultivator of British talent, during the long period of more than thirty years, having been the tutor of Miss Stephens, (now Countess of Essex,) the late Miss Bolton, (afterwards Lady Thurlow,) Miss M. Tree, (now Mrs. Bradshaw,) Miss Mori, (now Madame Goslaw,) Miss Russell, (now Mrs. Tomkins,) Miss Moffat, (now Mrs. Elwell,) Miss Shury, (now Mrs. Marshall,) Miss Fanny Woodham, Miss M'Mahon, Miss Redford, Miss Lanza, Mr. Wilson, &c. &c., continues to receive professional pupils for the stage, concerts, or the situation of governess (perfecting them as teachers for schools or private families). His terms are for a single lesson at the houses of pupils 10s. 6d., at his own house 7s., and for an apprentice 100 guineas. Amateurs who wish to be able to take part in choral singing at sight, may perfect themselves by joining Signor Lanza's new academy, which he is establishing for that style of singing in classes, on very moderate terms; being only four guineas for the whole series of fifty-two lessons, one per week during twelve months, payable seven shillings per month; with the addition of four vocal concerts, one every three months; to which each pupil will be entitled to two tickets, besides their own entrance. For further particulars see prospectus, to be had at Signor Lanza's residence, 2, Seymour-street, Euston-square, and of all Music-sellers; where also may be had the following compositions by Signor Lanza.

TRIO. For three ladies—"Silently over the sea."	3 0
DUETT. "The Hermit."	2 0
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A grand Messa di Gloria for two Sopranos, Tenor and Bass, in a new style.	1 4 0

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**ALLINGHAM'S ROTTERDAM SOLVENT,** which gives relief upon the first application. The universally-acknowledged efficacy of this extraordinary, safe, and never-failing remedy for the speedy and certain cure of Corns and Bunions, however obstinate and long standing, induces the Proprietor of this highly-important chemical discovery, to caution the Public against base and spurious imitations, injurious in their effect, and most dangerous to those who, either through ignorance, or the fraudulent pretences of others, are induced to apply them. The proprietor has received testimonials of its beneficial effects from the most respectable families in the kingdom. The genuine has the signature of "J. A. Sharwood" on the outside wrapper. Sold at 55, Bishopsgate-without; and, by appointment, by Sanger, 160, & Chandler, 76, Oxford-street; and most medicine vendors.

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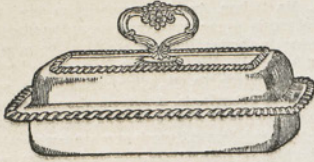
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Super Coloured Cloth Dress Coats, from	2 10 0	3 0 0
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The largest stock of any House in the trade of the most fashionable Waistcoats	0 10 0	to 1 8 0

Young Gentlemen's Suits, Servants' Liveries, &c., made upon the shortest notice, and upon such terms as will ensure future favours.

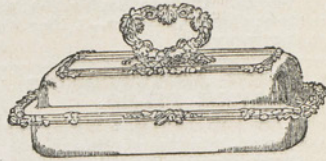
No. 52, King William-street, City.

A. B. SAVORY and SONS, Goldsmiths,  
No. 14, CORNHILL, opposite the Bank of England, LONDON.

PLATED CORNER DISHES, WITH SILVER EDGES AND SHIELDS FOR ENGRAVING.



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THE FLOWER PATTERN.

Four Dishes and Covers

Strongly Plated,	small size ...	£7 7 0
Ditto	full size .....	10 10 0
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Extra strong Plating, full size...	£13 10 0
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Any of the above Sets form eight Dishes by removing the Handles from the Covers.

The Show Rooms of this Establishment occupy several floors and contain an extensive Stock of Plated Goods, Silver Plate, Jewellery, and Watches.

A Pamphlet, with Drawings and detailed Lists of Prices, may be had, on application, free of cost.

**ENGLISH GOLD WATCHES.**—A. B. SAVORY & SONS, Watchmakers, No. 9, Cornhill, London, opposite the Bank of England, submit for selection a very large STOCK of GOLD WATCHES, the whole of which are made and finished under the careful inspection of experienced workmen on their own premises, and each warranted for correct performance.

SIZE FOR LADIES.

Fine Vertical Watches, jewelled, in engine-turned gold cases, and gold dials, warranted .....	£10 10 0
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Patent Detached Lever Watches, jewelled in four holes, with double-backed gold cases, and gold dials, warranted .....	£14 14 0

SIZE FOR GENTLEMEN.

Patent Detached Lever Watches, jewelled in four holes, seconds, and double-backed gold cases, warranted.....	£14 14 0
Patent Detached Lever Watches, capped, jewelled in six holes, seconds, double-backed gold cases and enamel dials, warranted.	£17 17 0
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..... £11

in six holes,  
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in six holes,  
s, warranted. £21

in gold hunting

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overrates.



*Miss Nickleby introduced to her Uncle's friends.*



*des femmes*



*Mr. Ralph Nichtelz's 'honest' composition.*

## CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS KNAG, AFTER DOATING ON KATE NICKLEBY FOR THREE WHOLE DAYS, MAKES UP HER MIND TO HATE HER FOR EVERMORE. THE CAUSES WHICH LEAD MISS KNAG TO FORM THIS RESOLUTION.

THERE are many lives of much pain, hardship, and suffering, which, having no stirring interest for any but those who lead them, are disregarded by persons who do not want thought or feeling, but who pamper their compassion and need high stimulants to rouse it.

There are not a few among the disciples of charity who require in their vocation scarcely less excitement than the votaries of pleasure in theirs; and hence it is that diseased sympathy and compassion are every day expended on out-of-the-way objects, when only too many demands upon the legitimate exercise of the same virtues in a healthy state, are constantly within the sight and hearing of the most unobservant person alive. In short, charity must have its romance, as the novelist or playwright must have his. A thief in fustian is a vulgar character, scarcely to be thought of by persons of refinement; but dress him in green velvet, with a high-crowned hat, and change the scene of his operations from a thickly-peopled city to a mountain road, and you shall find in him the very soul of poetry and adventure. So it is with the one great cardinal virtue, which, properly nourished and exercised, leads to, if it does not necessarily include, all the others. It must have its romance; and the less of real hard struggling work-a-day life there is in that romance, the better.

The life to which poor Kate Nickleby was devoted, in consequence of the unforeseen train of circumstances already developed in this narrative, was a hard one; but lest the very dullness, unhealthy confinement, and bodily fatigue, which made up its sum and substance, should deprive it of any interest with the mass of the charitable and sympathetic, I would rather keep Miss Nickleby herself in view just now, than chill them in the outset by a minute and lengthened description of the establishment presided over by Madame Mantalini.

"Well, now, indeed Madame Mantalini," said Miss Knag, as Kate was taking her weary way homewards on the first night of her noviciate; "that Miss Nickleby is a very creditable young person—a very creditable young person indeed—hem—upon my word, Madame Mantalini, it does very extraordinary credit even to your discrimination that you should have found such a very excellent, very well-behaved, very—hem—very unassuming young woman to assist in the fitting on. I have seen some young women when they had the opportunity of displaying before their betters, behave in such a—oh, dear—well—but you're always right, Madame Mantalini, always; and as I very often tell the young ladies, how you do contrive to be always right, when so many people are so often wrong, is to me a mystery indeed."

"Beyond putting a very excellent client out of humour, Miss Nickleby has not done anything very remarkable to-day—that I am aware of, at least," said Madame Mantalini in reply.

"Oh, dear!" said Miss Knag; "but you must allow a great deal for inexperience, you know."

"And youth?" inquired Madame.

"Oh, I say nothing about that, Madame Mantalini," replied Miss Knag, reddening; "because if youth were any excuse, you wouldn't have—"

"Quite so good a forewoman as I have, I suppose," suggested Madame.

"Well, I never did know anybody like you, Madame Mantalini," rejoined Miss Knag most complacently, "and that's the fact, for you know what one's going to say, before it has time to rise to one's lips. Oh, very good! Ha, ha, ha!"

"For myself," observed Madame Mantalini, glancing with affected carelessness at her assistant, and laughing heartily in her sleeve, "I consider Miss Nickleby the most awkward girl I ever saw in my life."

"Poor dear thing," said Miss Knag, "it's not her fault. If it was, we might hope to cure it; but as it's her misfortune, Madame Mantalini, why really you know, as the man said about the blind horse, we ought to respect it."

"Her uncle told me she had been considered pretty," remarked Madame Mantalini. "I think her one of the most ordinary girls I ever met with."

"Ordinary!" cried Miss Knag with a countenance beaming delight; "and awkward! Well, all I can say is, Madame Mantalini, that I quite love the poor girl; and that if she was twice as indifferent-looking, and twice as awkward as she is, I should be only so much the more her friend, and that's the truth of it."

In fact, Miss Knag had conceived an incipient affection for Kate Nickleby, after witnessing her failure that morning, and this short conversation with her superior increased the favourable prepossession to a most surprising extent; which was the more remarkable, as when she first scanned that young lady's face and figure, she had entertained certain inward misgivings that they would never agree.

"But now," said Miss Knag, glancing at the reflection of herself in a mirror at no great distance, "I love her—I quite love her—I declare I do."

Of such a highly disinterested quality was this devoted friendship, and so superior was it to the little weaknesses of flattery or ill-nature, that the kind-hearted Miss Knag candidly informed Kate Nickleby next day, that she saw she would never do for the business, but that she need not give herself the slightest uneasiness on this account, for that she (Miss Knag) by increased exertions on her own part, would keep her as much as possible in the back ground, and that all she would have to do would be to remain perfectly quiet before company, and to shrink from attracting notice by every means in her power. This last suggestion was so much in accordance with the timid girl's own feelings



and wishes, that she readily promised implicit reliance on the excellent spinster's advice: without questioning, or indeed bestowing a moment's reflection upon the motives that dictated it.

"I take quite a lively interest in you, my dear soul, upon my word," said Miss Knag; "a sister's interest, actually. It's the most singular circumstance I ever knew."

Undoubtedly it was singular, that if Miss Knag did feel a strong interest in Kate Nickleby, it should not rather have been the interest of a maiden aunt or grandmother, that being the conclusion to which the difference in their respective ages would have naturally tended. But Miss Knag wore clothes of a very youthful pattern, and perhaps her feelings took the same shape.

"Bless you!" said Miss Knag, bestowing a kiss upon Kate at the conclusion of the second day's work, "how very awkward you have been all day."

"I fear your kind and open communication, which has rendered me more painfully conscious of my own defects, has not improved me," sighed Kate.

"No, no, I dare say not," rejoined Miss Knag, in a most uncommon flow of good humour. "But how much better that you should know it at first, and so be able to go on straight and comfortable. Which way are you walking, my love?"

"Towards the city," replied Kate.

"The city!" cried Miss Knag, regarding herself with great favour in the glass as she tied her bonnet. "Goodness gracious me! now do you really live in the city?"

"Is it so very unusual for anybody to live there?" asked Kate, half smiling.

"I couldn't have believed it possible that any young woman could have lived there under any circumstances whatever, for three days together," replied Miss Knag.

"Reduced—I should say poor people," answered Kate, correcting herself hastily, for she was afraid of appearing proud, "must live where they can."

"Ah! very true, so they must; very proper indeed!" rejoined Miss Knag with that sort of half sigh, which, accompanied by two or three slight nods of the head, is pity's small change in general society; "and that's what I very often tell my brother, when our servants go away ill one after another, and he thinks the back kitchen's rather too damp for 'em to sleep in. These sort of people, I tell him, are glad to sleep anywhere! Heaven suits the back to the burden. What a nice thing it is to think that it should be so, isn't it?"

"Very," replied Kate, turning away.

"I'll walk with you part of the way, my dear," said Miss Knag, "for you must go very near our house; and as it's quite dark, and our last servant went to the hospital a week ago, with Saint Anthony's fire in her face, I shall be glad of your company."

Kate would willingly have excused herself from this flattering companionship, but Miss Knag having adjusted her bonnet to her entire

satisfaction, took her arm with an air which plainly showed how much she felt the compliment she was conferring, and they were in the street before she could say another word.

"I fear," said Kate, hesitating, "that mama—my mother, I mean—is waiting for me."

"You needn't make the least apology, my dear," said Miss Knag, smiling sweetly as she spoke; "I dare say she is a very respectable old person, and I shall be quite—hem—quite pleased to know her."

As poor Mrs. Nickleby was cooling—not her heels alone, but her limbs generally at the street corner, Kate had no alternative but to make her known to Miss Knag, who, doing the last new carriage customer at second-hand, acknowledged the introduction with condescending politeness. The three then walked away arm in arm, with Miss Knag in the middle, in a special state of amiability.

"I have taken such a fancy to your daughter, Mrs. Nickleby, you can't think," said Miss Knag, after she had proceeded a little distance in dignified silence.

"I am delighted to hear it," said Mrs. Nickleby; "though it is nothing new to me, that even strangers should like Kate."

"Hem!" cried Miss Knag.

"You will like her better when you know how good she is," said Mrs. Nickleby. "It is a great blessing to me in my misfortunes to have a child, who knows neither pride or vanity, and whose bringing-up might very well have excused a little of both at first. You don't know what it is to lose a husband, Miss Knag."

As Miss Knag had never yet known what it was to gain one, it followed very nearly as a matter of course that she didn't know what it was to lose one, so she said in some haste, "No, indeed I don't," and said it with an air intended to signify that she should like to catch herself marrying anybody—no no, she knew better than that.

"Kate has improved even in this little time, I have no doubt," said Mrs. Nickleby, glancing proudly at her daughter.

"Oh! of course," said Miss Knag.

"And will improve still more," added Mrs. Nickleby.

"That she will, I'll be bound," replied Miss Knag, squeezing Kate's arm in her own, to point the joke.

"She always was clever," said poor Mrs. Nickleby, brightening up, "always, from a baby. I recollect when she was only two years and a half old, that a gentleman who used to visit very much at our house—Mr. Watkins, you know, Kate, my dear, that your poor papa went bail for, who afterwards ran away to the United States, and sent us a pair of snow shoes, with such an affectionate letter that it made your poor dear father cry for a week. You remember the letter, in which he said that he was very sorry he couldn't repay the fifty pounds just then, because his capital was all out at interest, and he was very busy making his fortune, but that he didn't forget you were his god-daughter, and he should take it very unkind if we didn't buy you a silver coral and put it down to his old account—dear me, yes, my dear, how stupid you are! and spoke so affectionately of the old port wine that he used

to drink a bottle and a half of every time he came. You must remember, Kate?"

"Yes, yes, mama; what of him?"

"Why, that Mr. Watkins, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby slowly, as if she were making a tremendous effort to recollect something of paramount importance; "that Mr. Watkins—he wasn't any relation, Miss Knag will understand, to the Watkins who kept the Old Boar in the village; by the by, I don't remember whether it was the Old Boar or the George the Fourth, but it was one of the two, I know, and it's much the same—that Mr. Watkins said, when you were only two years and a half old, that you were one of the most astonishing children he ever saw. He did indeed, Miss Knag, and he wasn't at all fond of children, and couldn't have had the slightest motive for doing it. I know it was he who said so, because I recollect, as well as if it was only yesterday, his borrowing twenty pounds of her poor dear papa the very moment afterwards."

Having quoted this extraordinary and most disinterested testimony to her daughter's excellence, Mrs. Nickleby stopped to breathe; and Miss Knag, finding that the discourse was turning upon family greatness, lost no time in striking in with a small reminiscence on her own account.

"Don't talk of lending money, Mrs. Nickleby," said Miss Knag, "or you'll drive me crazy, perfectly crazy. My mamma—hem—was the most lovely and beautiful creature, with the most striking and exquisite—hem—the most exquisite nose that ever was put upon a human face, I do believe, Mrs. Nickleby (here Miss Knag rubbed her own nose sympathetically); the most delightful and accomplished woman, perhaps, that ever was seen; but she had that one failing of lending money, and carried it to such an extent that she lent—hem—oh! thousands of pounds, all our little fortunes, and what's more, Mrs. Nickleby, I don't think, if we were to live till—till—hem—till the very end of time, that we should ever get them back again. I don't indeed."

After concluding this effort of invention without being interrupted, Miss Knag fell into many more recollections, no less interesting than true, the full tide of which Mrs. Nickleby in vain attempting to stem, at length sailed smoothly down, by adding an under-current of her own recollections; and so both ladies went on talking together in perfect contentment: the only difference between them being, that whereas Miss Knag addressed herself to Kate, and talked very loud, Mrs. Nickleby kept on in one unbroken monotonous flow, perfectly satisfied to be talking, and caring very little whether anybody listened or not.

In this manner they walked on very amicably until they arrived at Miss Knag's brother's, who was an ornamental stationer and small circulating library keeper, in a by-street off Tottenham Court Road, and who let out by the day, week, month, or year, the newest old novels, whereof the titles were displayed in pen-and-ink characters on a sheet of pasteboard, swinging at his door-post. As Miss Knag happened at the moment to be in the middle of an account of her twenty-second offer from a gentleman of large property, she insisted upon their all going in to supper together; and in they went.

"Don't go away, Mortimer," said Miss Knag as they entered the shop. "It's only one of our young ladies and her mother. Mrs. and Miss Nickleby."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Mortimer Knag. "Ah!"

Having given utterance to these ejaculations with a very profound and thoughtful air, Mr. Knag slowly snuffed two kitchen candles on the counter and two more in the window, and then snuffed himself from a box in his waistcoat pocket.

There was something very impressive in the ghostly air with which all this was done, and as Mr. Knag was a tall lank gentleman of solemn features, wearing spectacles, and garnished with much less hair than a gentleman bordering on forty or thereabouts usually boasts, Mrs. Nickleby whispered her daughter that she thought he must be literary. "Past ten," said Mr. Knag, consulting his watch. "Thomas, close the warehouse."

Thomas was a boy nearly half as tall as a shutter, and the warehouse was a shop about the size of three hackney coaches.

"Ah!" said Mr. Knag once more, heaving a deep sigh as he restored to its parent shelf the book he had been reading. "Well—yes—I believe supper is ready, sister."

With another sigh Mr. Knag took up the kitchen candles from the counter, and preceded the ladies with mournful steps to a back parlour, where a char-woman, employed in the absence of the sick servant, and remunerated with certain eighteenpences to be deducted from her wages due, was putting the supper out.

"Mrs. Blockson," said Miss Knag, reproachfully, "how very often I have begged you not to come into the room with your bonnet on."

"I can't help it, Miss Knag," said the char-woman, bridling up on the shortest notice. "There's been a deal o' cleaning to do in this house, and if you don't like it, I must trouble you to look out for somebody else, for it don't hardly pay me, and that's the truth, if I was to be hung this minute."

"I don't want any remarks, if *you* please," said Miss Knag, with a strong emphasis on the personal pronoun. "Is there any fire down stairs for some hot water presently?"

"No there is not, indeed, Miss Knag," replied the substitute; "and so I won't tell you no stories about it."

"Then why isn't there?" said Miss Knag.

"Because there an't no coals left out, and if I could make coals I would, but as I can't I won't, and so I make bold to tell you Mem," replied Mrs. Blockson.

"Will you hold your tongue—female?" said Mr. Mortimer Knag, plunging violently into this dialogue.

"By your leave, Mr. Knag," retorted the char-woman, turning sharp round. "I'm only too glad not to speak in this house, excepting when and where I'm spoke to, Sir; and with regard to being a female, Sir, I should wish to know what you considered yourself?"

"A miserable wretch," exclaimed Mr. Knag, striking his forehead. "A miserable wretch."

"I'm very glad to find that you don't call yourself out of your name, Sir," said Mrs. Blockson; "and as I had two twin children the day before yesterday was only seven weeks, and my little Charley fell down a airy and put his elber out last Monday, I shall take it as a favior if you'll send nine shillings for one week's work to my house, afore the clock strikes ten to-morrow."

With these parting words, the good woman quitted the room with great ease of manner, leaving the door wide open, while Mr. Knag, at the same moment, flung himself into the "warehouse," and groaned aloud.

"What is the matter with that gentleman, pray?" inquired Mrs. Nickleby, greatly disturbed by the sound.

"Is he ill?" inquired Kate, really alarmed.

"Hush!" replied Miss Knag; "a most melancholy history. He was once most devotedly attached to—hem—to Madame Mantalini."

"Bless me!" exclaimed Mrs. Nickleby.

"Yes," continued Miss Knag, "and received great encouragement too, and confidently hoped to marry her. He has a most romantic heart, Mrs. Nickleby, as indeed—hem—as indeed all our family have, and the disappointment was a dreadful blow. He is a wonderfully accomplished man—most extraordinarily accomplished—reads—hem—reads every novel that comes out; I mean every novel that—hem—that has any fashion in it, of course. The fact is, that he did find so much in the books he read applicable to his own misfortunes, and did find himself in every respect so much like the heroes—because of course he is conscious of his own superiority, as we all are, and very naturally—that he took to scorning everything, and became a genius; and I am quite sure that he is at this very present moment writing another book."

"Another book!" repeated Kate, finding that a pause was left for somebody to say something.

"Yes," said Miss Knag, nodding in great triumph; "another book, in three volumes post octavo. Of course it's a great advantage to him in all his little fashionable descriptions to have the benefit of my—hem—of my experience, because of course few authors who write about such things can have such opportunities of knowing them as I have. He's so wrapped up in high life, that the least allusion to business or worldly matters—like that woman just now for instance—quite distracts him; but, as I often say, I think his disappointment a great thing for him, because if he hadn't been disappointed he couldn't have written about blighted hopes and all that; and the fact is if it hadn't happened as it has, I don't believe his genius would ever have come out at all."

How much more communicative Miss Knag might have become under more favourable circumstances it is impossible to divine, but as the gloomy one was within ear-shot and the fire wanted making up, her disclosures stopped here. To judge from all appearances, and the difficulty of making the water warm, the last servant could not have been much accustomed to any other fire than St. Anthony's; but a little brandy and water was made at last, and the guests, having been

previously regaled with cold leg of mutton and bread and cheese, soon afterwards took leave; Kate amusing herself all the way home with the recollection of her last glimpse of Mr. Mortimer Knag deeply abstracted in the shop, and Mrs. Nickleby by debating within herself whether the dress-making firm would ultimately become "Mantalini, Knag, and Nickleby," or "Mantalini, Nickleby, and Knag."

At this high point, Miss Knag's friendship remained for three whole days, much to the wonderment of Madame Mantalini's young ladies who had never beheld such constancy in that quarter before, but on the fourth it received a check no less violent than sudden, which thus occurred.

It happened that an old lord of great family, who was going to marry a young lady of no family in particular, came with the young lady, and the young lady's sister, to witness the ceremony of trying on two nuptial bonnets which had been ordered the day before; and Madame Mantalini announcing the fact in a shrill treble through the speaking-pipe, which communicated with the work-room, Miss Knag darted hastily up stairs with a bonnet in each hand, and presented herself in the show-room in a charming state of palpitation, intended to demonstrate her enthusiasm in the cause. The bonnets were no sooner fairly on, than Miss Knag and Madame Mantalini fell into convulsions of admiration.

"A most elegant appearance," said Madame Mantalini.

"I never saw anything so exquisite in all my life," said Miss Knag.

Now the old lord, who was a *very* old lord, said nothing, but mumbled and chuckled in a state of great delight, no less with the nuptial bonnets and their wearers, than with his own address in getting such a fine woman for his wife; and the young lady, who was a very lively young lady, seeing the old lord in this rapturous condition, chased the old lord behind a cheval-glass, and then and there kissed him, while Madame Mantalini and the other young lady looked discreetly another way.

But pending the salutation, Miss Knag, who was tinged with curiosity, stepped accidentally behind the glass, and encountered the lively young lady's eye just at the very moment when she kissed the old lord; upon which the young lady in a pouting manner murmured something about "an old thing," and "great impertinence," and finished by darting a look of displeasure at Miss Knag and smiling contemptuously.

"Madam Mantalini," said the young lady.

"Ma'am," said Madame Mantalini.

"Pray have up that pretty young creature we saw yesterday."

"Oh yes, do," said the sister.

"Of all things in the world, Madame Mantalini," said the lord's intended, throwing herself languidly on a sofa, "I hate being waited upon by frights or elderly persons. Let me always see that young creature, I beg, whenever I come."

"By all means," said the old lord; "the lovely young creature, by all means."

"Everybody is talking about her," said the young lady, in the same careless manner; "and my lord, being a great admirer of beauty, must positively see her."

"She is universally admired," replied Madame Mantalini. "Miss Knag, send up Miss Nickleby. You needn't return."

"I beg your pardon, Madame Mantalini, what did you say last?" asked Miss Knag, trembling.

"You needn't return," repeated the superior sharply. Miss Knag vanished without another word, and in all reasonable time was replaced by Kate, who took off the new bonnets and put on the old ones: blushing very much to find that the old lord and the two young ladies were staring her out of countenance all the time.

"Why, how you colour, child!" said the lord's chosen bride.

"She is not quite so accustomed to her business as she will be in a week or two," interposed Madame Mantalini with a gracious smile.

"I am afraid you have been giving her some of your wicked looks, my lord," said the intended.

"No, no, no," replied the old lord, "no, no, I'm going to be married and lead a new life. Ha, ha, ha! a new life, a new life! ha, ha, ha!"

It was a satisfactory thing to hear that the old gentleman was going to lead a new life, for it was pretty evident that his old one would not last him much longer. The mere exertion of protracted chuckling reduced him to a fearful ebb of coughing and gasping, and it was some minutes before he could find breath to remark that the girl was too pretty for a milliner.

"I hope you don't think good looks a disqualification for the business, my lord," said Madame Mantalini, simpering.

"Not by any means," replied the old lord, "or you would have left it long ago."

"You naughty creature!" said the lively lady, poking the peer with her parasol; "I won't have you talk so. How dare you?"

This playful inquiry was accompanied with another poke and another, and then the old lord caught the parasol, and wouldn't give it up again, which induced the other lady to come to the rescue, and some very pretty sportiveness ensued.

"You will see that those little alterations are made, Madame Mantalini," said the lady. "Nay, my lord, you positively shall go first; I wouldn't leave you behind with that pretty girl, not for half a second. I know you too well. Jane, my dear, let him go first, and we shall be quite sure of him."

The old lord, evidently much flattered by this suspicion, bestowed a grotesque leer upon Kate as he passed, and receiving another tap with the parasol for his wickedness, tottered down stairs to the door, where his sprightly body was hoisted into the carriage by two stout footmen.

"Foh!" said Madame Mantalini, "how he ever gets into a carriage without thinking of a hearse, I can't think. There, take the things away, my dear, take them away."

Kate, who had remained during the whole scene with her eyes modestly fixed upon the ground, was only too happy to avail herself of the permission to retire, and hastened joyfully down stairs to Miss Knag's dominion.

The circumstances of the little kingdom had greatly changed, how-

ever, during the short period of her absence. In place of Miss Knag being stationed in her accustomed seat, preserving all the dignity and greatness of Madame Mantalini's representative, that worthy soul was reposing on a large box, bathed in tears, while three or four of the young ladies in close attendance upon her, together with the presence of hartshorn, vinegar, and other restoratives, would have borne ample testimony, even without the derangement of the head-dress and front row of curls, to her having fainted desperately.

"Bless me!" said Kate, stepping hastily forward, "What is the matter?"

This inquiry produced in Miss Knag violent symptoms of a relapse; and several young ladies, darting angry looks at Kate, applied more vinegar and hartshorn, and said it was "a shame."

"What is a shame?" demanded Kate. "What is the matter? What has happened? tell me."

"Matter!" cried Miss Knag, coming all at once bolt upright, to the great consternation of the assembled maidens; "Matter! Fie upon you, you nasty creature!"

"Gracious!" cried Kate, almost paralysed by the violence with which the adjective had been jerked out from between Miss Knag's closed teeth; "have I offended you?"

"You offended me!" retorted Miss Knag, "You! a chit, a child, an upstart nobody! Oh, indeed! Ha, ha!"

Now, it was evident as Miss Knag laughed, that something struck her as being exceedingly funny, and as the young ladies took their tone from Miss Knag—she being the chief—they all got up a laugh without a moment's delay, and nodded their heads a little, and smiled sarcastically to each other, as much as to say, how very good that was.

"Here she is," continued Miss Knag, getting off the box, and introducing Kate with much ceremony and many low curtsseys to the delighted throng; "here she is—everybody is talking about her—the belle, ladies—the beauty, the—oh, you bold-faced thing!"

At this crisis Miss Knag was unable to repress a virtuous shudder, which immediately communicated itself to all the young ladies, after which Miss Knag laughed, and after that, cried.

"For fifteen years," exclaimed Miss Knag, sobbing in a most affecting manner, "for fifteen years I have been the credit and ornament of this room and the one up-stairs. Thank God," said Miss Knag, stamping first her right foot and then her left with remarkable energy, "I have never in all that time, till now, been exposed to the arts, the vile arts of a creature, who disgraces us all with her proceedings, and makes proper people blush for themselves. But I feel it, I do feel it, although I am disgusted."

Miss Knag here relapsed into softness, and the young ladies renewing their attentions, murmured that she ought to be superior to such things, and that for their part they despised them, and considered them beneath their notice; in witness whereof they called out more emphatically than before that it was a shame, and that they felt so angry, they did, they hardly knew what to do with themselves.



"Have I lived to this day to be called a fright!" cried Miss Knag, suddenly becoming convulsive, and making an effort to tear her front off.

"Oh no, no," replied the chorus, "pray don't say so; don't, now."

"Have I deserved to be called an elderly person?" screamed Miss Knag, wrestling with the supernumeraries.

"Don't think of such things, dear," answered the chorus.

"I hate her," cried Miss Knag; "I detest and hate her. Never let her speak to me again; never let anybody who is a friend of mine speak to her; a slut, a hussy, an impudent artful hussy!" Having denounced the object of her wrath in these terms, Miss Knag screamed once, hiccuped thrice, and gurgled in her throat several times: slumbered, shivered, woke, came to, composed her head-dress, and declared herself quite well again.

Poor Kate had regarded these proceedings at first in perfect bewilderment. She had then turned red and pale by turns, and once or twice essayed to speak; but as the true motives of this altered behaviour developed themselves, she retired a few paces, and looked calmly on without deigning a reply. But although she walked proudly to her seat, and turned her back upon the group of little satellites who clustered round their ruling planet in the remotest corner of the room, she gave way in secret to some such bitter tears as would have gladdened Miss Knag inmost soul if she could have seen them fall.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

DESCRIPTIVE OF A DINNER AT MR. RALPH NICKLEBY'S, AND OF THE MANNER IN WHICH THE COMPANY ENTERTAINED THEMSELVES BEFORE DINNER, AT DINNER, AND AFTER DINNER.

THE bile and rancour of the worthy Miss Knag undergoing no diminution during the remainder of the week, but rather augmenting with every successive hour; and the honest ire of all the young ladies rising, or seeming to rise, in exact proportion to the good spinster's indignation, and both waxing very hot every time Miss Nickleby was called up stairs, it will be readily imagined that that young lady's daily life was none of the most cheerful or enviable kind. She hailed the arrival of Saturday night, as a prisoner would a few delicious hours' respite from slow and wearing torture, and felt, that the poor pittance for her first week's labour would have been dearly and hardly earned had its amount been trebled.

When she joined her mother, as usual at the street corner, she was not a little surprised to find her in conversation with Mr. Ralph Nickleby; but her surprise was soon redoubled, no less by the matter of their conversation, than by the smoothed and retired manner of Mr. Nickleby himself.

"Ah! my dear!" said Ralph; "we were at that moment talking about you."

"Indeed!" replied Kate, shrinking, though she scarce knew why, from her uncle's cold glistening eye.

"That instant," said Ralph. "I was coming to call for you, making sure to catch you before you left; but your mother and I have been talking over family affairs, and the time has slipped away so rapidly——"

"Well, now, hasn't it?" interposed Mrs. Nickleby, quite insensible to the sarcastic tone of Ralph's last remark. "Upon my word, I couldn't have believed it possible, that such a——Kate, my dear, you're to dine with your uncle at half-past six o'clock to-morrow."

Triumphing in having been the first to communicate this extraordinary intelligence, Mrs. Nickleby nodded and smiled a great many times, to impress its full magnificence on Kate's wondering mind, and then flew off, at an acute angle, to a committee of ways and means.

"Let me see," said the good lady. "Your black silk frock will be quite dress enough, my dear, with that pretty little scarf, and a plain band in your hair, and a pair of black silk stock——Dear, dear," cried Mrs. Nickleby, flying off at another angle, "if I had but those unfortunate amethysts of mine—you recollect them, Kate, my love—how they used to sparkle, you know—but your papa, your poor dear papa—ah! there never was anything so cruelly sacrificed as those jewels were, never!" Overpowered by this agonising thought, Mrs. Nickleby shook her head in a melancholy manner, and applied her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I don't want them, mama, indeed," said Kate. "Forget that you ever had them."

"Lord, Kate, my dear," rejoined Mrs. Nickleby, pettishly, "how like a child you talk. Four-and-twenty silver tea spoons, brother-in-law, two gravies, four salts, all the amethysts—necklace, brooch, and ear-rings—all made away with at the same time, and I saying almost on my bended knees to that poor good soul, 'Why don't you do something, Nicholas? Why don't you make some arrangement?' I am sure that anybody who was about us at that time will do me the justice to own, that if I said that once, I said it fifty times a-day. Didn't I, Kate, my dear? Did I ever lose an opportunity of impressing it on your poor papa?"

"No, no, mama, never," replied Kate. And to do Mrs. Nickleby justice, she never had lost—and to do married ladies as a body justice, they seldom do lose—any occasion of inculcating similar golden precepts, whose only blemish is, the slight degree of vagueness and uncertainty in which they are usually developed.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Nickleby, with great fervour, "if my advice had been taken at the beginning—Well, I have always done *my* duty, and that's some comfort."

When she had arrived at this reflection, Mrs. Nickleby sighed, rubbed her hands, cast up her eyes, and finally assumed a look of meek composure, thus importing that she was a persecuted saint, but that she

wouldn't trouble her hearers by mentioning a circumstance which must be so obvious to everybody.

"Now," said Ralph, with a smile, which, in common with all other tokens of emotion, seemed to skulk under his face, rather than play boldly over it—"to return to the point from which we have strayed. I have a little party of—of—gentlemen with whom I am connected in business just now, at my house to-morrow; and your mother has promised that you shall keep house for me. I am not much used to parties; but this is one of business, and such fooleries are an important part of it sometimes. You don't mind obliging me?"

"Mind!" cried Mrs. Nickleby. "My dear Kate, why——"

"Pray," interrupted Ralph, motioning her to be silent. "I spoke to my niece."

"I shall be very glad, of course, uncle," replied Kate; "but I am afraid you will find me very awkward and embarrassed."

"Oh no," said Ralph; "come when you like, in a hackney coach—I'll pay for it. Good night—a—a—God bless you."

The blessing seemed to stick in Mr. Ralph Nickleby's throat, as if it were not used to the thoroughfare, and didn't know the way out. But it got out somehow, though awkwardly enough; and having disposed of it, he shook hands with his two relatives, and abruptly left them.

"What a very strongly-marked countenance your uncle has," said Mrs. Nickleby, quite struck with his parting look. "I don't see the slightest resemblance to his poor brother."

"Mama!" said Kate, reprovingly. "To think of such a thing!"

"No," said Mrs. Nickleby, musing. "There certainly is none. But it's a very honest face."

The worthy matron made this remark with great emphasis and elocution, as if it comprised no small quantity of ingenuity and research; and in truth it was not unworthy of being classed among the extraordinary discoveries of the age. Kate looked up hastily, and as hastily looked down again.

"What has come over you, my dear, in the name of goodness?" asked Mrs. Nickleby, when they had walked on for some time in silence.

"I was only thinking, mama," answered Kate.

"Thinking!" repeated Mrs. Nickleby. "Aye, and indeed plenty to think about, too. Your uncle has taken a strong fancy to you, that's quite clear; and if some extraordinary good fortune doesn't come to you after this, I shall be a little surprised, that's all."

With this, she launched out into sundry anecdotes of young ladies, who had had thousand pound notes given them in reticules, by eccentric uncles; and of young ladies who had accidentally met amiable gentlemen of enormous wealth at their uncles' houses, and married them, after short but ardent courtships; and Kate, listening first in apathy, and afterwards in amusement, felt, as they walked home, something of her mother's sanguine complexion gradually awakening in her own bosom, and began to think that her prospects might be brightening, and that better days might be dawning upon them. Such is hope, Heaven's own gift to struggling mortals; pervading, like some subtle

essence from the skies, all things, both good and bad; as universal as death, and more infectious than disease.

The feeble winter's sun—and winter's suns in the city are very feeble indeed—might have brightened up as he shone through the dim windows of the large old house, on witnessing the unusual sight which one half-furnished room displayed. In a gloomy corner, where for years had stood a silent dusty pile of merchandise, sheltering its colony of mice, and frowning a dull and lifeless mass upon the panelled room, save when, responding to the roll of heavy waggons in the street without, it quaked with sturdy tremblings and caused the bright eyes of its tiny citizens to grow brighter still with fear, and struck them motionless, with attentive ear and palpitating heart, until the alarm had passed away—in this dark corner was arranged, with scrupulous care, all Kate's little finery for the day; each article of dress partaking of that indescribable air of jauntiness and individuality which empty garments—whether by association, or that they become moulded as it were to the owner's form—will take, in eyes accustomed to, or picturing the wearer's smartness. In place of a bale of musty goods, there lay the black silk dress: the neatest possible figure in itself. The small shoes, with toes delicately turned out, stood upon the very pressure of some old iron weight; and a pile of harsh discoloured leather had unconsciously given place to the very same little pair of black silk stockings, which had been the objects of Mrs. Nickleby's peculiar care. Rats and mice, and such small gear, had long ago been starved or emigrated to better quarters; and in their stead appeared gloves, bands, scarfs, hair-pins, and many other little devices, almost as ingenious in their way as rats and mice themselves, for the tantalisation of mankind. About and among them all, moved Kate herself, not the least beautiful or unwonted relief to the stern old gloomy building.

In good time, or in bad time, as the reader likes to take it, for Mrs. Nickleby's impatience went a great deal faster than the clocks at that end of the town, and Kate was dressed to the very last hair-pin a full hour and a half before it was at all necessary to begin to think about it—in good time, or in bad time, the toilet was completed; and it being at length the hour agreed upon for starting, the milkman fetched a coach from the nearest stand, and Kate, with many adieus to her mother, and many kind messages to Miss La Creevy, who was to come to tea, seated herself in it, and went away in state if ever any body went away in state in a hackney coach yet. And the coach, and the coachman, and the horses, rattled, and jangled, and whipped, and cursed, and swore, and tumbled on together, till they came to Golden Square.

The coachman gave a tremendous double knock at the door, which was opened long before he had done, as quickly as if there had been a man behind it with his hand tied to the latch. Kate, who had expected no more uncommon appearance than Newman Noggs in a clean shirt, was not a little astonished to see that the opener was a man in handsome livery, and that there were two or three others in the hall. There was no doubt about its being the right house, however, for there was the name upon the door, so she accepted the laced coat-sleeve

which was tendered her, and entering the house, was ushered up stairs, into a back drawing-room, where she was left alone.

If she had been surprised at the apparition of the footman, she was perfectly absorbed in amazement at the richness and splendour of the furniture. The softest and most elegant carpets, the most exquisite pictures, the costliest mirrors; articles of richest ornament, quite dazzling from their beauty, and perplexing from the prodigality with which they were scattered around, encountered her on every side. The very staircase nearly down to the hall door, was crammed with beautiful and luxurious things, as though the house were brim-full of riches, which, with a very trifling addition, would fairly run over into the street.

Presently she heard a series of loud double knocks at the street-door, and after every knock some new voice in the next room; the tones of Mr. Ralph Nickleby were easily distinguishable at first, but by degrees they merged into the general buzz of conversation, and all she could ascertain was, that there were several gentlemen with no very musical voices, who talked very loud, laughed very heartily, and swore more than she would have thought quite necessary. But this was a question of taste.

At length the door opened, and Ralph himself, divested of his boots, and ceremoniously embellished with black silks and shoes, presented his crafty face.

"I couldn't see you before, my dear," he said, in a low tone, and pointing as he spoke, to the next room. "I was engaged in receiving them. Now—shall I take you in?"

"Pray uncle," said Kate, a little flurried, as people much more conversant with society often are when they are about to enter a room full of strangers, and have had time to think of it previously, "are there any ladies here?"

"No," said Ralph, shortly, "I don't know any."

"Must I go in immediately?" asked Kate, drawing back a little.

"As you please," said Ralph, shrugging his shoulders. "They are all come, and dinner will be announced directly afterwards—that's all."

Kate would have entreated a few minutes' respite, but reflecting that her uncle might consider the payment of the hackney-coach fare a sort of bargain for her punctuality, she suffered him to draw her arm through his and to lead her away.

Seven or eight gentlemen were standing round the fire when they went in, and as they were talking very loud were not aware of their entrance until Mr. Ralph Nickleby, touching one on the coat-sleeve, said in a harsh emphatic voice, as if to attract general attention—

"Lord Frederick Verisopht, my niece, Miss Nickleby."

The group dispersed as if in great surprise, and the gentleman addressed, turning round, exhibited a suit of clothes of the most superlative cut, a pair of whiskers of similar quality, a moustache, a head of hair, and a young face.

"Eh!" said the gentleman. "What—the—deyvl!"

With which broken ejaculations he fixed his glass in his eye, and stared at Miss Nickleby in great surprise.

"My niece, my lord," said Ralph.

"Well, then my ears did not deceive me, and it's not wa-a-x work," said his lordship. "How de do? I'm very happy." And then his lordship turned to another superlative gentleman, something older, something stouter, something redder in the face, and something longer upon town, and said in a loud whisper that the girl was "deyvlish pitty."

"Introduce me, Nickleby," said this second gentleman, who was lounging with his back to the fire, and both elbows on the chimney-piece.

"Sir Mulberry Hawk," said Ralph.

"Otherwise the most knowing card in the pa-ack, Miss Nickleby," said Lord Frederick Verisopht.

"Don't leave me out, Nickleby," cried a sharp-faced gentleman, who was sitting on a low chair with a high back, reading the paper.

"Mr. Pyke," said Ralph.

"Nor me, Nickleby," cried a gentleman with a flushed face and a flash air, from the elbow of Sir Mulberry Hawk.

"Mr. Pluck," said Ralph. Then wheeling about again towards a gentleman with the neck of a stork and the legs of no animal in particular, Ralph introduced him as the Honorable Mr. Snobb; and a white-headed person at the table as Colonel Chowser. The colonel was in conversation with somebody, who appeared to be a make-weight, and was not introduced at all.

There were two circumstances which, in this early stage of the party, struck home to Kate's bosom, and brought the blood tingling to her face. One was the flippant contempt with which the guests evidently regarded her uncle, and the other the easy insolence of their manner towards herself. That the first symptom was very likely to lead to the aggravation of the second it needed no great penetration to foresee. And here Mr. Ralph Nickleby had reckoned without his host; for however fresh from the country a young lady (by nature) may be, and however unacquainted with conventional behaviour, the chances are that she will have quite as strong an innate sense of the decencies and proprieties of life as if she had run the gauntlet of a dozen London seasons—possibly a stronger one, for such senses have been known to blunt in this improving process.

When Ralph had completed the ceremonial of introduction, he led his blushing niece to a seat, and as he did so, glanced warily round as though to assure himself of the impression which her unlooked-for appearance had created.

"An unexpected playsure, Nickleby," said Lord Frederick Verisopht, taking his glass out of his right eye, where it had until now done duty on Kate, and fixing it in his left to bring it to bear on Ralph.

"Designed to surprise you, Lord Frederick," said Mr. Pluck.

"Not a bad idea," said his lordship, "and one that would almost warrant the addition of an extra two and a half per cent."

"Nickleby," said Sir Mulberry Hawk, in a thick coarse voice, "take the hint, and tack it on to the other five-and-twenty, or whatever it is, and give me half for the advice."

Sir Mulberry garnished this speech with a hoarse laugh, and terminated it with a pleasant oath regarding Mr. Nickleby's limbs, whereat Messrs. Pyke and Pluck "laughed consumedly."

These gentlemen had not yet quite recovered the jest when dinner was announced, and then they were thrown into fresh ecstasies by a similar cause; for Sir Mulberry Hawk, in an excess of humour, shot dexterously past Lord Frederick Verisopht who was about to lead Kate down stairs, and drew her arm through his up to the elbow.

"No, damn it, Verisopht," said Sir Mulberry, "fair play's a jewel, and Miss Nickleby and I settled the matter with our eyes, ten minutes ago."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Honourable Mr. Snobb, "very good, very good."

Rendered additionally witty by this applause, Sir Mulberry Hawk leered upon his friends most facetiously, and led Kate down stairs with an air of familiarity, which roused in her gentle breast such disgust and burning indignation, as she felt it almost impossible to repress. Nor was the intensity of these feelings at all diminished, when she found herself placed at the top of the table, with Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Verisopht on either side.

"Oh, you've found your way into our neighbourhood, have you?" said Sir Mulberry as his lordship sat down.

"Of course," replied Lord Frederick, fixing his eyes on Miss Nickleby, "how can you a-ask me?"

"Well, you attend to your dinner," said Sir Mulberry, "and don't mind Miss Nickleby and me, for we shall prove very indifferent company, I dare say."

"I wish you'd interfere here, Nickleby," said Lord Verisopht.

"What is the matter, my lord?" demanded Ralph from the bottom of the table, where he was supported by Messrs. Pyke and Pluck.

"This fellow, Hawk, is monopolising your niece," said Lord Frederick.

"He has a tolerable share of everything that you lay claim to, my lord," said Ralph with a sneer.

"Gad, so he has," replied the young man; "deyvle take me if I know which is master in my house, he or I."

"I know," muttered Ralph.

"I think I shall cut him off with a shilling," said the young nobleman, jocosely.

"No, no, curse it," said Sir Mulberry. "When you come to the shilling—the last shilling—I'll cut you fast enough; but till then, I'll never leave you—you may take your oath of it."

This sally (which was strictly founded on fact,) was received with a general roar, above which, was plainly distinguishable the laughter of Mr. Pyke and Mr. Pluck, who were evidently Sir Mulberry's toads in ordinary. Indeed, it was not difficult to see, that the majority of the company preyed upon the unfortunate young lord, who, weak and silly as he was, appeared by far the least vicious of the party. Sir Mulberry Hawk was remarkable for his tact in ruining, by himself

and his creatures, young gentlemen of fortune—a genteel and elegant profession, of which he had undoubtedly gained the head. With all the boldness of an original genius, he had struck out an entirely new course of treatment quite opposed to the usual method, his custom being, when he had gained the ascendancy over those he took in hand, rather to keep them down than to give them their own way; and to exercise his vivacity upon them openly and without reserve. Thus he made them butts in a double sense, and while he emptied them with great address, caused them to ring with sundry well-administered taps for the diversion of society.

The dinner was as remarkable for the splendour and completeness of its appointments as the mansion itself, and the company were remarkable for doing it ample justice, in which respect Messrs. Pyke and Pluck particularly signalised themselves; these two gentlemen eating of every dish, and drinking of every bottle, with a capacity and perseverance truly astonishing. They were remarkably fresh too, notwithstanding their great exertions: for, on the appearance of the dessert, they broke out again, as if nothing serious had taken place since breakfast.

“Well,” said Lord Frederick, sipping his first glass of port, “if this is a discounting dinner, all I have to say is, deyvle take me, if it wouldn’t be a good pla-an to get discount every day.”

“You’ll have plenty of it in your time,” returned Sir Mulberry Hawk; “Nickleby will tell you that.”

“What do you say, Nickleby?” inquired the young man; “am I to be a good customer?”

“It depends entirely on circumstances, my lord,” replied Ralph.

“On your lordship’s circumstances,” interposed Colonel Chouser of the Militia—and the race-courses.

The gallant Colonel glanced at Messrs. Pyke and Pluck as if he thought they ought to laugh at his joke, but those gentlemen, being only engaged to laugh for Sir Mulberry Hawk, were, to his signal discomfiture, as grave as a pair of undertakers. To add to his defeat, Sir Mulberry, considering any such efforts an invasion of his peculiar privilege, eyed the offender steadily through his glass as if astounded at his presumption, and audibly stated his impression that it was an “infernal liberty,” which being a hint to Lord Frederick, he put up his glass, and surveyed the object of censure as if he were some extraordinary wild animal then exhibiting for the first time. As a matter of course, Messrs. Pyke and Pluck stared at the individual whom Sir Mulberry Hawk stared at; so the poor Colonel, to hide his confusion, was reduced to the necessity of holding his port before his right eye and affecting to scrutinise its colour with the most lively interest.

All this while Kate had sat as silently as she could, scarcely daring to raise her eyes, lest they should encounter the admiring gaze of Lord Frederick Verisoph, or, what was still more embarrassing, the bold looks of his friend Sir Mulberry. The latter gentleman was obliging enough to direct general attention towards her.



"Here is Miss Nickleby," observed Sir Mulberry, "wondering why the deuce somebody doesn't make love to her."

"No, indeed," said Kate, looking hastily up, "I——" and then she stopped, feeling it would have been better to have said nothing at all.

"I'll hold any man fifty pounds," said Sir Mulberry, "that Miss Nickleby can't look in my face, and tell me she wasn't thinking so."

"Done!" cried the noble gull. "Within ten minutes."

"Done!" responded Sir Mulberry. The money was produced on both sides, and the Honourable Mr. Snobb was elected to the double office of stake-holder and time-keeper.

"Pray," said Kate, in great confusion, while these preliminaries were in course of completion. "Pray do not make me the subject of any bets. Uncle, I cannot really——"

"Why not, my dear?" replied Ralph, in whose grating voice, however, there was an unusual huskiness, as though he spoke unwillingly, and would rather that the proposition had not been broached. "It is done in a moment; there is nothing in it. If the gentlemen insist on it——"

"I don't insist on it," said Sir Mulberry, with a loud laugh. "That is, I by no means insist upon Miss Nickleby's making the denial, for if she does, I lose; but I shall be glad to see her bright eyes, especially as she favours the mahogany so much."

"So she does, and it's too ba-a-d of you, Miss Nickleby," said the noble youth.

"Quite cruel," said Mr. Pyke.

"Horrid cruel," said Mr. Pluck.

"I don't care if I do lose," said Sir Mulberry, "for one tolerable look at Miss Nickleby's eyes is worth double the money."

"More," said Mr. Pyke.

"Far more," said Mr. Pluck.

"How goes the enemy, Snobb?" asked Sir Mulberry Hawk.

"Four minutes gone."

"Bravo!"

"Won't you ma-ake one effort for me, Miss Nickleby?" asked Lord Frederick, after a short interval.

"You needn't trouble yourself to inquire, my buck," said Sir Mulberry; "Miss Nickleby and I understand each other; she declares on my side, and shews her taste. You haven't a chance, old fellow. Time now, Snobb?"

"Eight minutes gone."

"Get the money ready," said Sir Mulberry; "you'll soon hand over."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Pyke.

Mr. Pluck, who always came second, and topped his companion if he could, screamed outright.

The poor girl, who was so overwhelmed with confusion that she scarcely knew what she did, had determined to remain perfectly quiet; but fearing that by so doing she might seem to countenance Sir Mulberry's boast, which had been uttered with great coarseness and vulgarity of manner, raised her eyes, and looked him in the face. There was

something so odious, so insolent, so repulsive in the look which met her, that, without the power to stammer forth a syllable, she rose and hurried from the room. She restrained her tears by a great effort until she was alone up stairs, and then gave them vent.

"Capital!" said Sir Mulberry Hawk, putting the stakes in his pocket. "That's a girl of spirit, and we'll drink her health."

It is needless to say that Pyke and Co. responded with great warmth of manner to this proposal, or that the toast was drunk with many little insinuations from the firm, relative to the completeness of Sir Mulberry's conquest. Ralph, who, while the attention of the other guests was attracted to the principals in the preceding scene, had eyed them like a wolf, appeared to breathe more freely now his niece was gone; and the decanters passing quickly round, leant back in his chair, and turned his eyes from speaker to speaker, as they warmed with wine, with looks that seemed to search their hearts and lay bare for his distempered sport every idle thought within them.

Meantime Kate, left wholly to herself, had in some degree recovered her composure. She had learnt from a female attendant, that her uncle wished to see her before she left, and had also gleaned the satisfactory intelligence, that the gentlemen would take coffee at table. The prospect of seeing them no more contributed greatly to calm her agitation, and, taking up a book, she composed herself to read.

She started now and then when the sudden opening of the dining-room door let loose a wild shout of noisy revelry, and more than once rose in great alarm, as a fancied footstep on the staircase impressed her with the fear that some stray member of the party was returning alone. Nothing occurring, however, to realise her apprehensions, she endeavoured to fix her attention more closely on her book, in which by degrees she became so much interested, that she had read on through several chapters without heed of time or place, when she was terrified by suddenly hearing her name pronounced by a man's voice close at her ear.

The book fell from her hand. Lounging on an ottoman close beside her, was Sir Mulberry Hawk, evidently the worse—if a man be a ruffian at heart, he is never the better—for wine.

"What a delightful studiousness!" said this accomplished gentleman. "Was it real, now, or only to display the eye-lashes?"

Kate bit her lip, and looking anxiously towards the door, made no reply.

"I have looked at 'em for five minutes," said Sir Mulberry. "Upon my soul, they're perfect. Why did I speak, and destroy such a pretty little picture!"

"Do me the favour to be silent now, Sir," replied Kate.

"No, don't," said Sir Mulberry, folding his crush hat to lay his elbow on, and bringing himself still closer to the young lady; "upon my life, you oughtn't to. Such a devoted slave of yours, Miss Nickleby—it's an infernal thing to treat him so harshly, upon my soul it is."

"I wish you to understand, Sir," said Kate, trembling in spite of herself, but speaking with great indignation, "that your behaviour

offends and disgusts me. If you have one spark of gentlemanly feeling remaining, you will leave me instantly."

"Now why," said Sir Mulberry, "why will you keep up this appearance of excessive rigour, my sweet creature? Now, be more natural—my dear Miss Nickleby, be more natural—do."

Kate hastily rose; but as she rose, Sir Mulberry caught her dress, and forcibly detained her.

"Let me go, Sir," she cried, her heart swelling with anger. "Do you hear? Instantly—this moment."

"Sit down, sit down," said Sir Mulberry; "I want to talk to you."

"Unhand me, Sir, this instant," cried Kate.

"Not for the world," rejoined Sir Mulberry. Thus speaking, he leant over, as if to replace her in her chair; but the young lady making a violent effort to disengage herself, he lost his balance, and measured his length upon the ground. As Kate sprung forward to leave the room, Mr. Ralph Nickleby appeared in the door-way, and confronted her.

"What is this?" said Ralph.

"It is this, Sir," replied Kate, violently agitated: "that beneath the roof where I, a helpless girl, your dead brother's child, should most have found protection, I have been exposed to insult which should make you shrink to look upon me. Let me pass you."

Ralph *did* shrink, as the indignant girl fixed her kindling eye upon him; but he did not comply with her injunction, nevertheless; for he led her to a distant seat, and returning and approaching Sir Mulberry Hawk, who had by this time risen, motioned towards the door.

"Your way lies there, Sir," said Ralph, in a suppressed voice, that some devil might have owned with pride.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded his friend, fiercely.

The swollen veins stood out like sinews on Ralph's wrinkled forehead, and the nerves about his mouth worked as though some unendurable torture wrung them; but he smiled disdainfully, and again pointed to the door.

"Do you know me, you madman?" asked Sir Mulberry.

"Well," said Ralph. The fashionable vagabond for the moment quite quailed under the steady look of the older sinner, and walked towards the door, muttering as he went.

"You wanted the lord, did you?" he said, stopping short when he reached the door, as if a new light had broken in upon him, and confronting Ralph again. "Damme, I was in the way, was I?"

Ralph smiled again, but made no answer.

"Who brought him to you first?" pursued Sir Mulberry; "and how without me could you ever have wound him in your net as you have?"

"The net is a large one, and rather full," said Ralph. "Take care that it chokes nobody in the meshes."

"You would sell your flesh and blood for money; yourself, if you have not already made a bargain with the devil," retorted the other. "Do you mean to tell me that your pretty niece was not brought here as a decoy for the drunken boy down stairs?"

Although this hurried dialogue was carried on in a suppressed tone on both sides, Ralph looked involuntarily round to ascertain that Kate had not moved her position so as to be within hearing. His adversary saw the advantage he had gained, and followed it up.

"Do you mean to tell me," he asked again, "that it is not so? Do you mean to say that if he had found his way up here instead of me, you wouldn't have been a little more blind, and a little more deaf, and a little less flourishing than you have been? Come, Nickleby, answer me that."

"I tell you this," replied Ralph, "that if I brought her here, as a matter of business——"

"Aye, that's the word," interposed Sir Mulberry, with a laugh. "You're coming to yourself again now."

"—As a matter of business," pursued Ralph, speaking slowly and firmly, as a man who has made up his mind to say no more, "because I thought she might make some impression on the silly youth you have taken in hand and are lending good help to ruin, I knew—knowing him—that it would be long before he outraged her girl's feelings, and that unless he offended by mere puppyism and emptiness, he would, with a little management, respect the sex and conduct even of his usurer's niece. But if I thought to draw him on more gently by this device, I did not think of subjecting the girl to the licentiousness and brutality of so old a hand as you. And now we understand each other."

"Especially as there was nothing to be got by it—eh?" sneered Sir Mulberry.

"Exactly so," said Ralph. He had turned away, and looked over his shoulder to make this last reply. The eyes of the two worthies met with an expression as if each rascal felt that there was no disguising himself from the other; and Sir Mulberry Hawk shrugged his shoulders and walked slowly out.

His friend closed the door, and looked restlessly towards the spot where his niece still remained in the attitude in which he had left her. She had flung herself heavily upon the couch, and with her head drooping over the cushion and her face hidden in her hands, seemed to be still weeping in an agony of shame and grief.

Ralph would have walked into any poverty-stricken debtor's house, and pointed him out to a bailiff, though in attendance upon a young child's deathbed, without the smallest concern, because it would have been a matter quite in the ordinary course of business, and the man would have been an offender against his only code of morality. But here was a young girl, who had done no wrong but that of coming into the world alive; who had patiently yielded to all his wishes; who had tried so hard to please him—above all, who didn't owe him money—and he felt awkward and nervous.

Ralph took a chair at some distance, then another chair a little nearer, then moved a little nearer still, then nearer again, and finally sat himself on the same sofa, and laid his hand on Kate's arm.

"Hush, my dear!" he said, as she drew it back, and her sobs burst out afresh. "Hush, hush! Don't mind it now; don't think of it."

"Oh, for pity's sake, let me go home," cried Kate. "Let me leave this house, and go home."

"Yes, yes," said Ralph. "You shall. But you must dry your eyes first, and compose yourself. Let me raise your head. There—there."

"Oh, uncle!" exclaimed Kate, clasping her hands. "What have I done—what have I done—that you should subject me to this? If I had wronged you in thought, or word, or deed, it would have been most cruel to me, and the memory of one you must have loved in some old time; but——"

"Only listen to me for a moment," interrupted Ralph, seriously alarmed by the violence of her emotions. "I didn't know it would be so; it was impossible for me to foresee it. I did all I could.—Come, let us walk about. You are faint with the closeness of the room, and the heat of these lamps. You will be better now, if you make the slightest effort."

"I will do anything," replied Kate, "if you will only send me home."

"Well, well, I will," said Ralph; "but you must get back your own looks, for those you have will frighten them, and nobody must know of this but you and I. Now let us walk the other way. There. You look better even now."

With such encouragements as these, Ralph Nickleby walked to and fro, with his niece leaning on his arm; quelled by her eye, and actually trembling beneath her touch.

In the same manner, when he judged it prudent to allow her to depart, he supported her down stairs, after adjusting her shawl and performing such little offices, most probably for the first time in his life. Across the hall, and down the steps Ralph led her too; nor did he withdraw his hand, until she was seated in the coach.

As the door of the vehicle was roughly closed, a comb fell from Kate's hair, close at her uncle's feet; and as he picked it up and returned it into her hand, the light from a neighbouring lamp shone upon her face. The lock of hair that had escaped and curled loosely over her brow, the traces of tears yet scarcely dry, the flushed cheek, the look of sorrow, all fired some dormant train of recollection in the old man's breast; and the face of his dead brother seemed present before him, with the very look it wore on some occasion of boyish grief, of which every minutest circumstance flashed upon his mind, with the distinctness of a scene of yesterday.

Ralph Nickleby, who was proof against all appeals of blood and kindred—who was steeled against every tale of sorrow and distress—staggered while he looked, and reeled back into his house, as a man who had seen a spirit from some world beyond the grave.

## CHAPTER XX.

WHEREIN NICHOLAS AT LENGTH ENCOUNTERS HIS UNCLE, TO WHOM HE EXPRESSES HIS SENTIMENTS WITH MUCH CANDOUR. HIS RESOLUTION.

LITTLE Miss La Creevy trotted briskly through divers streets at the west end of the town early on Monday morning—the day after the dinner—charged with the important commission of acquainting Madame Mantalini that Miss Nickleby was too unwell to attend that day, but hoped to be enabled to resume her duties on the morrow. And as Miss La Creevy walked along, revolving in her mind various genteel forms and elegant turns of expression, with a view to the selection of the very best in which to couch her communication, she cogitated a good deal upon the probable causes of her young friend's indisposition.

"I don't know what to make of it," said Miss La Creevy. "Her eyes were decidedly red last night. She said she had a head-ache; head-aches don't occasion red eyes. She must have been crying."

Arriving at this conclusion, which, indeed, she had established to her perfect satisfaction on the previous evening, Miss La Creevy went on to consider—as she had done nearly all night—what new cause of unhappiness her young friend could possibly have had.

"I can't think of any thing," said the little portrait painter. "Nothing at all, unless it was the behaviour of that old bear. Cross to her, I suppose? Unpleasant brute!"

Relieved by this expression of opinion, albeit it was vented upon empty air, Miss La Creevy hurried on to Madame Mantalini's; and being informed that the governing power was not yet out of bed, requested an interview with the second in command, whereupon Miss Knag appeared.

"So far as *I* am concerned," said Miss Knag, when the message had been delivered, with many ornaments of speech; "I could spare Miss Nickleby for evermore."

"Oh, indeed, ma'am!" rejoined Miss La Creevy, highly offended. "But you see you are not mistress of the business, and therefore it's of no great consequence."

"Very good, ma'am," said Miss Knag. "Have you any further commands for me?"

"No, I have not, ma'am," rejoined Miss La Creevy.

"Then good morning, ma'am," said Miss Knag.

"Good morning to you, ma'am; and many obligations for your extreme politeness and good-breeding," rejoined Miss La Creevy.

Thus terminating the interview, during which both ladies had trembled very much, and been marvellously polite—certain indications that they were within an inch of a very desperate quarrel—Miss La Creevy bounced out of the room, and into the street.

"I wonder who that is," said the queer little soul. "A nice person to know, I should think! I wish I had the painting of her: I'd do her justice." So, feeling quite satisfied that she had said a very cutting thing at Miss Knag's expense, Miss La Creevy had a hearty laugh, and went home to breakfast, in great good humour.

Here was one of the advantages of having lived alone so long. The little bustling, active, cheerful creature, existed entirely within herself, talked to herself, made a confidant of herself, was as sarcastic as she could be, on people who offended her, by herself; pleased herself, and did no harm. If she indulged in scandal, nobody's reputation suffered; and if she enjoyed a little bit of revenge, no living soul was one atom the worse. One of the many to whom, from straitened circumstances, a consequent inability to form the associations they would wish, and a disinclination to mix with the society they could obtain, London is as complete a solitude as the plains of Syria, the humble artist had pursued her lonely, but contented way for many years; and, until the peculiar misfortunes of the Nickleby family attracted her attention, had made no friends, though brimfull of the friendliest feelings to all mankind. There are many warm hearts in the same solitary guise as poor Miss La Creevy's.

However, that's neither here nor there, just now. She went home to breakfast, and had scarcely caught the full flavour of her first sip of tea, when the servant announced a gentleman, whereat Miss La Creevy, at once imagining a new sitter, transfixed by admiration at the street-door case, was in unspeakable consternation at the presence of the tea-things.

"Here, take 'em away; run with 'em into the bed-room; anywhere," said Miss La Creevy. "Dear, dear; to think that I should be late on this particular morning, of all others, after being ready for three weeks by half-past eight o'clock, and not a soul coming near the place!"

"Don't let me put you out of the way," said a voice Miss La Creevy knew. "I told the servant not to mention my name, because I wished to surprise you."

"Mr. Nicholas!" cried Miss La Creevy, starting in great astonishment.

"You have not forgotten me, I see," replied Nicholas, extending his hand.

"Why I think I should even have known you if I had met you in the street," said Miss La Creevy, with a smile. "Hannah, another cup and saucer. Now I'll tell you what, young man; I'll trouble you not to repeat the impertinence you were guilty of on the morning you went away."

"You would not be very angry, would you?" asked Nicholas.

"Wouldn't I!" said Miss La Creevy. "You had better try; that's all."

Nicholas, with becoming gallantry, immediately took Miss La Creevy at her word, who uttered a faint scream and slapped his face; but it was not a very hard slap, and that's the truth.

"I never saw such a rude creature!" exclaimed Miss La Creevy.

"You told me to try," said Nicholas.

"Well; but I was speaking ironically," rejoined Miss La Creevy.

"Oh! that's another thing," said Nicholas; "you should have told me that, too."

"I dare say you didn't know, indeed!" retorted Miss La Creevy. "But now I look at you again, you seem thinner than when I saw you last, and your face is haggard and pale. And how come you to have left Yorkshire?"

She stopped here; for there was so much heart in her altered tone and manner, that Nicholas was quite moved.

"I need look somewhat changed," he said, after a short silence; "for I have undergone some suffering, both of mind and body, since I left London. I have been very poor, too, and have even suffered from want."

"Good Heaven, Mr. Nicholas!" exclaimed Miss La Creevy, "what are you telling me!"

"Nothing which need distress you quite so much," answered Nicholas, with a more sprightly air; "neither did I come here to bewail my lot, but on matter more to the purpose. I wish to meet my uncle face to face. I should tell you that first."

"Then all I have to say about that is," interposed Miss La Creevy, "that I don't envy you your taste; and that sitting in the same room with his very boots, would put me out of humour for a fortnight."

"In the main," said Nicholas, "there may be no great difference of opinion between you and me, so far; but you will understand, that I desire to confront him; to justify myself, and to cast his duplicity and malice in his throat."

"That's quite another matter," rejoined Miss La Creevy. "God forgive me; but I shouldn't cry my eyes quite out of my head, if they choked him. Well."

"To this end I called upon him this morning," said Nicholas. "He only returned to town on Saturday, and I knew nothing of his arrival until late last night."

"And did you see him?" asked Miss La Creevy.

"No," replied Nicholas. "He had gone out."

"Hah!" said Miss La Creevy; "on some kind, charitable business, I dare say."

"I have reason to believe," pursued Nicholas, "from what has been told me by a friend of mine, who is acquainted with his movements, that he intends seeing my mother and sister to-day, and giving them his version of the occurrences that have befallen me. I will meet him there."

"That's right," said Miss La Creevy, rubbing her hands. "And yet, I don't know—" she added, "there is much to be thought of—others to be considered."

"I have considered others," rejoined Nicholas; "but as honesty and honour are both at issue, nothing shall deter me."

"You should know best," said Miss La Creevy.

"In this case I hope so," answered Nicholas. "And all I want you to do for me, is, to prepare them for my coming. They think me a



long way off, and if I went wholly unexpected, I should frighten them. If you can spare time to tell them you have seen me, and that I shall be with them a quarter of an hour afterwards, you will do me a great service."

"I wish I could do you, or any of you, a greater," said Miss La Creevy; "but the power to serve is as seldom joined with the will, as the will with the power."

Talking on very fast and very much, Miss La Creevy finished her breakfast with great expedition; put away the tea-caddy and hid the key under the fender, resumed her bonnet, and, taking Nicholas's arm, sallied forth at once to the city. Nicholas left her near the door of his mother's house, and promised to return within a quarter of an hour at furthest.

It so chanced that Ralph Nickleby, at length seeing fit, for his own purposes, to communicate the atrocities of which Nicholas had been guilty, had (instead of first proceeding to another quarter of the town on business, as Newman Noggs supposed he would), gone straight to his sister-in-law. Hence when Miss La Creevy, admitted by a girl who was cleaning the house, made her way to the sitting-room, she found Mrs. Nickleby and Kate in tears, and Ralph just concluding his statement of his nephew's misdemeanours. Kate beckoned her not to retire, and Miss La Creevy took a seat in silence.

"You are here already, are you, my gentleman?" thought the little woman. "Then he shall announce himself, and see what effect that has on you."

"This is pretty," said Ralph, folding up Miss Squeers's note; "very pretty. I recommended him—against all my previous conviction, for I knew he would never do any good—to a man with whom, behaving himself properly, he might have remained in comfort for years. What is the result? Conduct, for which he might hold up his hand at the Old Bailey."

"I never will believe it," said Kate, indignantly; "never. It is some base conspiracy, which carries its own falsehood with it."

"My dear," said Ralph, "you wrong the worthy man. These are not inventions. The man is assaulted, your brother is not to be found; this boy, of whom they speak, goes with him—remember, remember."

"It is impossible," said Kate. "Nicholas!—and a thief, too! Mama, how can you sit and hear such statements?"

Poor Mrs. Nickleby, who had at no time been remarkable for the possession of a very clear understanding, and who had been reduced by the late changes in her affairs to a most complicated state of perplexity, made no other reply to this earnest remonstrance than exclaiming from behind a mass of pocket-handkerchief, that she never could have believed it—thereby most ingeniously leaving her hearers to suppose that she did believe it.

"It would be my duty, if he came in my way, to deliver him up to justice," said Ralph, "my bounden duty; I should have no other course, as a man of the world and a man of business, to pursue. And yet," said Ralph, speaking in a very marked manner, and looking

furtively, but fixedly, at Kate, "and yet I would not, I would spare the feelings of his—of his sister. And his mother of course," added Ralph, as though by an afterthought, and with far less emphasis.

Kate very well understood that this was held out as an additional inducement to her, to preserve the strictest silence regarding the events of the preceding night. She looked involuntarily towards Ralph as he ceased to speak, but he had turned his eyes another way, and seemed for the moment quite unconscious of her presence.

"Everything," said Ralph, after a long silence, broken only by Mrs. Nickleby's sobs, "everything combines to prove the truth of this letter, if indeed there were any possibility of disputing it. Do innocent men steal away from the sight of honest folks, and skulk in hiding-places like outlaws? Do innocent men inveigle nameless vagabonds, and prowl with them about the country as idle robbers do? Assault, riot, theft, what do you call these?"

"A lie!" cried a furious voice, as the door was dashed open, and Nicholas burst into the centre of the room.

In the first moment of surprise, and possibly of alarm, Ralph rose from his seat, and fell back a few paces, quite taken off his guard by this unexpected apparition. In another moment, he stood fixed and immovable with folded arms, regarding his nephew with a scowl of deadly hatred, while Kate and Miss La Creevy threw themselves between the two to prevent the personal violence which the fierce excitement of Nicholas appeared to threaten.

"Dear Nicholas," cried his sister, clinging to him. "Be calm, consider—"

"Consider, Kate!" cried Nicholas, clasping her hand so tight in the tumult of his anger, that she could scarcely bear the pain. "When I consider all, and think of what has passed, I need be made of iron to stand before him."

"Or bronze," said Ralph, quietly; "there is not hardihood enough in flesh and blood to face it out."

"Oh dear, dear!" cried Mrs. Nickleby, "that things should have come to such a pass as this!"

"Who speaks in a tone, as if I had done wrong, and brought disgrace on them?" said Nicholas, looking round.

"Your mother, Sir," replied Ralph, motioning towards her.

"Whose ears have been poisoned by you," said Nicholas; "by you—you, who under pretence of deserving the thanks she poured upon you, heaped every insult, wrong, and indignity, upon my head. You, who sent me to a den where sordid cruelty, worthy of yourself, runs wanton, and youthful misery stalks precocious; where the lightness of childhood shrinks into the heaviness of age, and its every promise blights, and withers as it grows. I call Heaven to witness," said Nicholas, looking eagerly round, "that I have seen all this, and that *that man* knows it."

"Refute these calumnies," said Kate, "and be more patient, so that you may give them no advantage. Tell us what you really did, and show that they are untrue."

"Of what do they—or of what does he accuse me?" said Nicholas.

"First, of attacking your master, and being within an ace of qualifying yourself to be tried for murder," interposed Ralph. "I speak plainly, young man, bluster as you will."

"I interfered," said Nicholas, "to save a miserable wretched creature from the vilest and most degrading cruelty. In so doing I inflicted such punishment upon a wretch as he will not readily forget, though far less than he deserved from me. If the same scene were renewed before me now, I would take the same part; but I would strike harder and heavier, and brand him with such marks as he should carry to his grave, go to it when he would."

"You hear?" said Ralph, turning to Mrs. Nickleby. "Penitence, this!"

"Oh dear me!" cried Mrs. Nickleby, "I don't know what to think, I really don't."

"Do not speak just now, mama, I entreat you," said Kate. "Dear Nicholas, I only tell you, that you may know what wickedness can prompt, but they accuse you of—a ring is missing, and they dare to say that—"

"The woman," said Nicholas, haughtily, "the wife of the fellow from whom these charges come, dropped—as I suppose—a worthless ring among some clothes of mine, early in the morning on which I left the house. At least, I know that she was in the bed-room where they lay, struggling with an unhappy child, and that I found it when I opened my bundle on the road. I returned it at once by coach, and they have it now."

"I knew, I knew," said Kate, looking towards her uncle. "About this boy, love, in whose company they say you left?"

"That boy, a silly, helpless creature, from brutality and hard usage, is with me now," rejoined Nicholas.

"You hear?" said Ralph, appealing to the mother again, "everything proved, even upon his own confession. Do you choose to restore that boy, Sir?"

"No, I do not," replied Nicholas.

"You do not?" sneered Ralph.

"No," repeated Nicholas, "not to the man with whom I found him. I would that I knew on whom he has the claim of birth: I might wring something from his sense of shame, if he were dead to every tie of nature."

"Indeed!" said Ralph. "Now, Sir, will you hear a word or two from me?"

"You can speak when and what you please," replied Nicholas, embracing his sister. "I take little heed of what you say or threaten."

"Mighty well, Sir," retorted Ralph; "but perhaps it may concern others, who may think it worth their while to listen, and consider what I tell them. I will address your mother, Sir, who knows the world."

"Ah! and I only too dearly wish I didn't," sobbed Mrs. Nickleby.

There really was no necessity for the good lady to be much distressed upon this particular head, the extent of her worldly knowledge being,

to say the least, very questionable; and so Ralph seemed to think, for he smiled as she spoke. He then glanced steadily at her and Nicholas by turns, as he delivered himself in these words:—

“Of what I have done, or what I meant to do, for you, ma'am, and my niece, I say not one syllable. I held out no promise, and leave you to judge for yourself. I hold out no threat now, but I say that this boy, headstrong, wilful, and disorderly as he is, should not have one penny of my money, or one crust of my bread, or one grasp of my hand, to save him from the loftiest gallows in all Europe. I will not meet him, come where he comes, or hear his name. I will not help him, or those who help him. With a full knowledge of what he brought upon you by so doing, he has come back in his selfish sloth, to be an aggravation of your wants, and a burden upon his sister's scanty wages. I regret to leave you, and more to leave her, now, but I will not encourage this compound of meanness and cruelty, and, as I will not ask you to renounce him, I see you no more.”

If Ralph had not known and felt his power in wounding those he hated, his glances at Nicholas would have shown it him in all its force, as he proceeded in the above address. Innocent as the young man was of all wrong, every artful insinuation stung, every well-considered sarcasm cut him to the quick, and when Ralph noted his pale face and quivering lip, he hugged himself to mark how well he had chosen the taunts best calculated to strike deep into a young and ardent spirit.

“I can't help it,” cried Mrs. Nickleby, “I know you have been very good to us, and meant to do a good deal for my dear daughter. I am quite sure of that; I know you did, and it was very kind of you, having her at your house and all—and of course it would have been a great thing for her, and for me too. But I can't, you know, brother-in-law, I can't renounce my own son, even if he has done all you say he has—it's not possible, I couldn't do it; so we must go to rack and ruin, Kate, my dear. I can bear it, I dare say.” Pouring forth these, and a perfectly wonderful train of other disjointed expressions of regret, which no mortal power but Mrs. Nickleby's could ever have strung together, that lady wrung her hands, and her tears fell faster.

“Why do you say *if* Nicholas has done what they say he has, mama?” asked Kate, with honest anger. “You know he has not.”

“I don't know what to think, one way or other, my dear,” said Mrs. Nickleby; “Nicholas is so violent, and your uncle has so much honest composure, that I can only hear what he says, and not what Nicholas does. Never mind, don't let us talk any more about it. We can go to the Workhouse, or the Refuge for the Destitute, or the Magdalen Hospital, I dare say; and the sooner we go the better.” With this extraordinary jumble of charitable institutions, Mrs. Nickleby again gave way to her tears.

“Stay,” said Nicholas, as Ralph turned to go. “You need not leave this place, Sir, for it will be relieved of my presence in one minute, and it will be long, very long, before I darken these doors again.”

“Nicholas,” cried Kate, throwing herself on her brother's shoulder, and clasping him in her arms, “do not say so. My dear brother, you

will break my heart. Mama, speak to him. Do not mind her, Nicholas; she does not mean it, you should know her better. Uncle, somebody, for God's sake speak to him."

"I never meant, Kate," said Nicholas, tenderly, "I never meant to stay among you; think better of me than to suppose it possible. I may turn my back on this town a few hours sooner than I intended, but what of that? We shall not forget each other apart, and better days will come when we shall part no more. Be a woman, Kate," he whispered, proudly, "and do not make me one while *he* looks on."

"No, no, I will not," said Kate, eagerly, "but you will not leave us. Oh! think of all the happy days we have had together, before these terrible misfortunes came upon us; of all the comfort and happiness of home, and the trials we have to bear now; of our having no protector under all the slights and wrongs that poverty so much favours, and you cannot leave us to bear them alone, without one hand to help us."

"You will be helped when I am away," replied Nicholas, hurriedly. "I am no help to you, no protector; I should bring you nothing but sorrow, and want, and suffering. My own mother sees it, and her fondness and fears for you point to the course that I should take. And so all good angels bless you, Kate, till I can carry you to some home of mine, where we may revive the happiness denied to us now, and talk of these trials as of things gone by. Do not keep me here, but let me go at once. There. Dear girl—dear girl."

The grasp which had detained him, relaxed, and Kate fainted in his arms. Nicholas stooped over her for a few seconds, and placing her gently in a chair, confided her to their honest friend.

"I need not entreat your sympathy," he said, wringing her hand, "for I know your nature. You will never forget them."

He stepped up to Ralph, who remained in the same attitude which he had preserved throughout the interview, and moved not a finger.

"Whatever step you take, Sir," he said, in a voice inaudible beyond themselves, "I will keep a strict account of. I leave them to you, at your desire. There will be a day of reckoning sooner or later, and it will be a heavy one for you if they are wronged."

Ralph did not allow a muscle of his face to indicate that he heard one word of this parting address. He hardly knew that it was concluded, and Mrs. Nickleby had scarcely made up her mind to detain her son by force if necessary, when Nicholas was gone.

As he hurried through the streets to his obscure lodging, seeking to keep pace, as it were, with the rapidity of the thoughts which crowded upon him, many doubts and hesitations arose in his mind and almost tempted him to return. But what would they gain by this? Supposing he were to put Ralph Nickleby at defiance, and were even fortunate enough to obtain some small employment, his being with them could only render their present condition worse, and might greatly impair their future prospects, for his mother had spoken of some new kindnesses towards Kate which she had not denied. "No," thought Nicholas, "I have acted for the best."

But before he had gone five hundred yards, some other and different feeling would come upon him, and then he would lag again, and pulling his hat over his eyes, give way to the melancholy reflections which pressed thickly upon him. To have committed no fault, and yet to be so entirely alone in the world; to be separated from the only persons he loved, and to be proscribed like a criminal, when six months ago he had been surrounded by every comfort, and looked up to as the chief hope of his family—this was hard to bear. He had not deserved it either. Well, there was comfort in that; and poor Nicholas would brighten up again, to be again depressed, as his quickly-shifting thoughts presented every variety of light and shade before him.

Undergoing these alternations of hope and misgiving, which no one, placed in a situation of even ordinary trial, can fail to have experienced, Nicholas at length reached his poor room, where, no longer borne up by the excitement which had hitherto sustained him, but depressed by the revulsion of feeling it left behind, he threw himself on the bed, and turning his face to the wall, gave free vent to the emotions he had so long stifled.

He had not heard anybody enter, and was unconscious of the presence of Smike, until, happening to raise his head, he saw him standing at the upper end of the room, looking wistfully towards him. He withdrew his eyes when he saw that he was observed, and affected to be busied with some scanty preparations for dinner.

“Well, Smike,” said Nicholas, as cheerfully as he could speak, “let me hear what new acquaintances you have made this morning, or what new wonder you have found out in the compass of this street and the next one.”

“No,” said Smike, shaking his head mournfully; “I must talk of something else to-day.”

“Of what you like,” replied Nicholas, good-humouredly.

“Of this,” said Smike. “I know you are unhappy, and have got into great trouble by bringing me away. I ought to have known that, and stopped behind—I would, indeed, if I had thought it then. You—you—are not rich: you have not enough for yourself, and I should not be here. You grow,” said the lad, laying his hand timidly on that of Nicholas, “you grow thinner every day; your cheek is paler, and your eye more sunk. Indeed I cannot bear to see you so, and think how I am burdening you. I tried to go away to-day, but the thought of your kind face drew me back. I could not leave you without a word.” The poor fellow could get no further, for his eyes filled with tears, and his voice was gone.

“The word which separates us,” said Nicholas, grasping him heartily by the shoulder, “shall never be said by me, for you are my only comfort and stay. I would not lose you now, for all the world could give. The thought of you has upheld me through all I have endured to-day, and shall, through fifty times such trouble. Give me your hand. My heart is linked to yours. We will journey from this place together, before the week is out. What, if I am steeped in poverty? You lighten it, and we will be poor together.”

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