dance, as if he meant dancing and nothing else, but secretly to stimulate the music to perform wild tunes. Father, he became particular in his attentions to the ladies; and dancing with Miss Blimber, whispered to her—whispered to her!—though not so softly but that Paul heard him say this remarkable poetry,

"Had I a heart for falsehood framed,
I ne'er could injure You!"

This, Paul heard him repeat to four young ladies in succession. Well he might say to Mr. Toots, that he was afraid he should be the worse for it, to-morrow!

Mrs. Blimber was a little alarmed by this—comparatively speaking—profligate behavior; and especially by the alteration in the character of the music, which, beginning to comprehend low melodies that were popular in the streets, might not unnaturally be supposed to give offence to Lady Skettles. But Lady Skettles was so very kind as to beg Mrs. Blimber not to mention it; and to receive her explanation that Mr. Feeder's spirits sometimes betrayed him into excesses on these occasions, with the greatest courtesy and politeness; observing, that he seemed a very nice sort of person for his situation, and that she particularly liked the unassuming style of his hair—which (as already hinted) was about a quarter of an inch long.

Once, when there was a pause in the dancing, Lady Skettles told Paul that he seemed very fond of music. Paul replied, that he was; and if she was too, she ought to hear his sister, Florence, sing. Lady Skettles presently discovered that she was dying with anxiety to have that gratification; and though Florence was at first verym uch frightened at being asked to sing before so many people, and begged earnestly to be excused, yet, on Paul calling her to him, and saying, "Do, Floy! Please! For me, my dear!" she went straight to the piano, and began. When they all drew a little away, that Paul might see her: and when he saw her sitting there alone, so young, and good, and beautiful, and kind to him; and heard her thrilling voice, so natural and sweet; and such a golden link between him and all his life's love and happiness, rising out of the silence; he turned his face away, and hid his tears. Not, as he told them when they spoke to him, not that the music was too plaintive or too sorrowful, but it was so dear to him.

They all loved Florence. How could they help it! Paul had known beforehand that they must and would; and sitting in his cushioned corner, with calmly folded hands, and one leg loosely doubled under him, few would have thought what triumph and delight expanded his childish bosom while he watched her, or what a sweet tranquillity he felt. Lavish encomiums on "Dombey's sister," reached his ears from all the boys; admiration of the self possessed and modest little beauty, was on every lip: reports of her intelligence and accomplishments floated past him, constantly; and, as if borne in upon the air of the summer night, there was a half-intelligible sentiment diffused around, referring to Florence and himself, and breathing sympathy for both, that soothed and touched him.

He did not know why. For all that the child observed, and felt, and thought, that night—the present and the absent; what was then and what had been—were blended like the colors in the rainbow, or in the plumage of rich birds when the sun is shining on them, or in the softening sky when the same sun is setting. The many things he had had to think of lately, passed before him in the music; not as claiming his attention over again, or as likely ever more to occupy it, but as peacefully disposed of and gone. A solitary window, gazed through years ago, looked out upon an ocean, miles and miles away; upon its waters, fancies, busy with him only yesterday, were hushed and lulled to rest like broken waves. The same mysterious murmur he had wondered at, when lying on his couch upon the beach, he thought he still heard sounding through his sister's song, and through the hum of voices, and the tread of feet, and having some part in the faces flitting by, and even in the heavy gentleness of Mr. Toots, who frequently came up to shake him by the hand. Through the universal kindness he still thought he heard it, speaking to him; and even his old-fashioned reputation seemed to be allied to it, he knew not how. Thus little Paul sat musing, listening, looking on, and dreaming; and was very happy.

Until the time arrived for taking leave: and then, indeed, there was a sensation in the party. Sir Barnet Skettles brought up Skettles Junior to shake hands with him, and asked him if he would remember to tell his good Papa, with his best compliments, that the Sir Barnet Skettles, had said he hoped the two young gentlemen would become intimately acquainted. Lady Skettles kissed him, and parted his hair upon his brow, and held him in her arms; and even Mrs. Baps—poor Mrs. Baps! Paul was glad of that—came over from beside the music-book of the gentleman who played the harp, and took leave of him quite as heartily as anybody in the room.

"Good bye, Doctor Blimber," said Paul, stretching out his hand.

"Good bye, my little friend," returned the Doctor.

"I'm very much obliged to you, Sir," said Paul, looking innocently up into his awful face. "Ask them to take care of Diogenes, if you please."

Diogenes was the dog; who had never in his life received a friend into his confidence before Paul. The Doctor promised that every attention should be paid to Diogenes in Paul's absence, and Paul having again thanked him, and shaken hands with him, bade adieu to Mrs. Blimber and Cornelia with such heartfelt earnestness that Mrs. Blimber forgot from that moment to mention Cicero to Lady Skettles, though she had fully intended it, all the evening. Cornelia taking both Paul's hands in hers, said, "Dombey, Dombey, you have always been my favorite pupil. God bless you!" And it showed, Paul thought, how easily one might do injustice to a person; for Miss Blimber meant it—though she was a Forcer—and felt it.

A buzz then went round among the young gentlemen, of "Dombey's going!" "Little Dombey's going!" and there was a general move after Paul and Florence down the staircase and into the hall, in which the whole Blimber family were included.—Such a circumstance, Mr. Feeder said aloud, as had never happened in the case of any former young gentleman within his experience; but it would be difficult to say if this were sober fact or custard-cups. The servants, with the butler at their head, had all an interest in seeing Little Dombey go; and even the weak-eyed young man, taking out his books and trunks to the coach that was to carry him and Florence to Mrs. Pipchin's for the night, melted visibly.

Not even the influence of the softer passion on the young gentlemen—and they all, to a boy, doted on Florence—could restrain them from taking quite a noisy leave of Paul; waving hats after him, pressing down stairs to shake hands with him, crying individually "Dombey, don't forget me!" and indulging in many such ebullitions of feeling, uncommon among those young Chesterfields. Paul whispered Florence, as she wrapped him up before the door was opened, Did she hear them? Would she ever forget it? Was she glad to know it? And a lively delight was in his eyes as he spoke to her.

Once, for a last look, he turned and gazed upon the faces thus addressed to him, surprised to see how shining and how bright, and numerous they were, and how they were all piled and heaped up, as faces are at crowded theatres. They swam before him, as he looked, like faces in an agitated glass; and next moment he was in the dark coach outside, holding close to Florence. From that time, whenever he thought of Doctor Blimber's, it came back as he had seen it in this last view; and it never seemed to be a real place again, but always a dream, full of eyes.

This was not quite the last of Doctor Blimber's, however. There was something else. There was Mr. Toots. Who, unexpectedly letting down one of the coach windows, and looking in, said, with a most egregious chuckle, "Is Dombey there?" and immediately put it up again, without waiting for an answer. Nor was this quite the last of Mr. Toots, even; for before the coachman could drive off, he as suddenly let down the other window, and looking in with a precisely similar chuckle, said in a precisely similar tone of voice, "Is Dombey there?" and disappeared precisely as before.

How Florence laughed! Paul often remembered it, and laughed himself whenever he did so.

But there was much, soon afterward—next day, and after that—which Paul could only recollect confusedly. As, why they stayed at Mrs. Pipchin's days and nights, instead of going home; why he lay in bed, with Florence sitting by his side; whether that had been his father in the room, or only a tall shadow on the wall; whether he had heard his doctor say, of some one, that if they had removed him before the occasion on which he had built up fancies, strong in proportion to his own weakness, it was very possible he might have pined away.

He could not even remember whether he had often said to Florence, "Oh Floy, take me home, and never leave me!" but he thought he had. He fancied sometimes he had heard himself repeating, "Take me home, Floy! take me home!"

But he could remember, when he got home, and was carried up the well-remembered stairs, that there had been the rumbling of a coach for many hours together, while he lay upon the seat, with Florence still beside him, and old Mrs. Pipchin sitting opposite. He remembered his old bed too, when they laid him down in it: his aunt, Miss Tox, and Susan; but there was something else, and recent too, that still perplexed him.

"I want to speak to Florence, if you please," he said. "To Florence by herself, for a moment!"

She bent down over him, and the others stood away.

"Floy, my pet, wasn't that Papa in the hall, when they brought me from the coach?"

"Yes, dear."

"He didn't cry, and go into his room, Floy, did he, when he saw me coming in?"

Florence shook her head, and pressed her lips against his cheek.

"I'm very glad he didn't cry," said little Paul.—"I thought he did. Don't tell them that I asked."

CHAPTER XV.

Amazing artfulness of Captain Cuttle, and a new pursuit for Walter Gay.

WALTER could not, for several days, decide what to do in the Barbados business; and even cherished some faint hope that Mr. Dombey might not have meant what he had said, or that he might change his mind, and tell him he was not to go. But as nothing occurred to give this idea (which was sufficiently improbable in itself) any touch of confirmation, and as time was slipping by, and he had none to lose, he felt that he must act, without hesitating any longer.

Walter's chief difficulty was, how to break the change in his affairs to Uncle Sol, to whom he was sensible it would be a terrible blow. He had the greater difficulty in dashing Uncle Sol's spirits with such an astounding piece of intelligence, because they had lately recovered very much, and the old man had become so cheerful, that the little back parlor was itself again. Uncle Sol had paid the first appointed portion of the debt to Mr. Dombey, and was hopeful of working his way through the rest; and to cast him down afresh, when he had sprung up so manfully from his troubles, was a very distressing necessity.

Yet it would never do to run away from him. He must know of it beforehand; and how to tell him, was the point. As to the question of going or not going, Walter did not consider that he had any power of choice in the matter. Mr. Dombey had truly told him that he was young, and that his uncle's circumstances were not good; and Mr. Dombey had plainly expressed, in the glance with which he had accompanied that reminder, that if he declined to go he might stay at home if he chose, but not in his counting-house. His uncle and he lay under a great obligation to Mr. Dombey, which was of Walter's own soliciting. He might have begun in secret to despair of ever winning that gentleman's favor, and might have thought that he was now and then disposed to put a slight upon him, which was hardly just. But what would have been duty without that was still duty with it—or Walter thought so—and duty must be done.

When Mr. Dombey had looked at him, and told him he was young, and that his uncle's circumstances were not good, there had been an expression of disdain in his face; a contemptuous and disparaging assumption that he would be quite content to live idly on a reduced old man, which stung the boy's generous soul. Determined to assure Mr. Dombey, in so far as it was possible to give him the assurance without expressing it in words, that indeed he mistook his nature, Walter had been anxious to show even more cheerfulness and activity after the West Indian interview than he had shown before: if that were possible, in one of his quick and zealous disposition. He was too young and inexperienced to think, that possibly this very quality in him was not agreeable to Mr. Dombey, and that it was no stepping-stone to his good opinion to be elastic and hopeful of pleasing under the shadow of his powerful displeasure, whether it were right or wrong. But it may have been—it may have been—that the great man thought himself defied in this new exposition of an honest spirit, and purposed to bring it down.

"Well! at last and at least, Uncle Sol must be told," thought Walter with a sigh. And as Walter was apprehensive that his voice might perhaps quaver a little, and that his countenance might not be quite as hopeful as he could wish it to be, if he told the old man himself, and saw the first effects of his communication on his wrinkled face, he resolved to avail himself of the services of that powerful mediator, Captain Cuttle. Sunday coming round, he set off, therefore, after breakfast, once more to beat up Captain Cuttle's quarters.

It was not unpleasant to remember, on the way thither, that Mrs. Mac Stinger resorted to a great distance every Sunday morning, to attend the ministry of the Reverend Melchisedech Howler, who, having been one day discharged from the West India Docks on a false supposition (got up expressly against him by the general enemy) of screwing gimlets into puncheons, and applying his lips to the orifice, had announced the destruction of the world for that day two years, at ten in the morning, and opened a front parlor for the reception of ladies and gentlemen of the Ranting persuasion, upon whom, on the first occasion of their assemblage, the admonitions of the Reverend Melchisedech had produced so powerful an effect, that, in their rapturous performance of a sacred jig, which closed the service, the whole flock broke through into a kitchen below, and disabled a mangle belonging to one of the fold.

This the Captain, in a moment of uncommon conviviality, had confided to Walter and his uncle, between the repetitions of lovely Peg, on the night when Brogley the broker was paid out. The Captain himself was punctual in his attendance at a church in his own neighborhood, which hoisted the union jack every Sunday morning; and where he was good enough—the lawful beadle being infirm—to keep an eye upon the boys, over whom he exercised great power, in virtue of his mysterious hook. Knowing the regularity of the Captain's habits, Walter made all the haste he could, that he might anticipate his going out; and he made such good speed that he had the pleasure, on turning into Brig Place, to behold the broad blue coat and waistcoat hanging out of the Captain's open window, to air in the sun.

It appeared incredible that the coat and waistcoat could be seen by mortal eyes without the Captain; but he certainly was not in them, otherwise his legs—the houses in Brig Place not being lofty—would have obstructed the street door, which was perfectly clear. Quite wondering at this discovery, Walter gave a single knock.

"Stinger," he distinctly heard the Captain say, up in his room, as if that were no business of his.—Therefore Walter gave two knocks.

"Cuttle," he heard the Captain say upon that; and immediately afterward the Captain, in his clean shirt and braces, with his neckerchief hanging loosely round his throat like a coil of rope, and his glazed hat on, appeared at the window, leaning out over the broad blue coat and waistcoat.

"Wal'r!" cried the Captain, looking down upon him in amazement.

"Ay, ay, Captain Cuttle," returned Walter, "only me."

"What's the matter, my lad?" inquired the Captain, with great concern. "Gills an't been and sprung nothing again!"

"No, no," said Walter. "My uncle's all right, Captain Cuttle."

The Captain expressed his gratification, and said he would come down below and open the door, which he did.

"Though you're early, Wal'r," said the Captain, eyeing him still doubtfully, when they got upstairs.

"Why, the fact is, Captain Cuttle," said Walter, sitting down, "I was afraid you would have gone out, and I want to benefit by your friendly counsel."

"So you shall," said the Captain; "what 'll you take?"

"I want to take your opinion, Captain Cuttle," returned Walter, smiling. "That's the only thing for me."

"Come on, then," said the Captain. "With a will, my lad!"

Walter related to him what had happened, and the difficulty in which he felt respecting his uncle, and the relief it would be to him if Captain Cuttle, in his kindness, would help him to smooth it away; Captain Cuttle's infinite consternation and astonishment at the prospect unfolded to him, gradually swallowing that gentleman up, until it left his face quite vacant, and the suit of blue, the glazed hat, and the hook, apparently without an owner.

"You see, Captain Cuttle," pursued Walter, "for myself, I am young, as Mr. Dombey said, and not to be considered. I am to fight my way through the world, I know; but there are two points I was thinking, as I came along, that I should be very particular about, in respect to my uncle. I don't mean to say that I deserve to be the pride and delight of his life—you believe me, I know—but I am. Now, don't you think I am?"

The Captain seemed to make an endeavor to rise from the depths of his astonishment, and get back to his face; but the effort being ineffectual, the glazed hat merely nodded with a mute, unutterable meaning.

"If I live and have my health," said Walter, "and I am not afraid of that, still, when I leave England I can hardly hope to see my uncle again.—He is old, Captain Cuttle; and beside, his life is a life of custom—"

"Steady, Wal'r! Of a want of custom?" said the Captain suddenly reappearing.

"Too true," returned Walter, shaking his head; "but I meant a life of habit, Captain Cuttle—that sort of custom. And if (as you very truly said, I am sure) he would have died the sooner for the loss of the stock and all those objects to which he had been accustomed for so many years, don't you think he might die a little sooner for the loss of—

"Of his Nevy," interposed the Captain.—"Right!"

"Well then," said Walter, trying to speak gaily, "we must do our best to make him believe that the separation is but a temporary one, after all; but as I know better, or dread that I know better, Captain Cuttle, and as I have so many reasons for regarding him with affection, and duty, and honor, I am afraid I should make but a very poor hand at that, if I tried to persuade him of it. That's my great reason for wishing you to break it out to him; and that's the first point."

"Keep her off a point or so!" observed the Captain, in a contemplative voice.

"What did you say, Captain Cuttle?" inquired Walter.

"Stand by!" returned the Captain, thoughtfully.

Walter paused to ascertain if the Captain had any particular information to add to this, but as he said no more, went on.

"Now, the second point, Captain Cuttle. I am sorry to say, I am not a favorite with Mr. Dombey. I have always tried to do my best, and I have always done it; but he does not like me. He can't help his likings and dislikings, perhaps. I say nothing of that. I only say that I am certain he does not like me. He does not send me to this post as a good one; he disdains to represent it as being better than it is; and I doubt very much if it will ever lead me to advancement in the House—whether it does not, on the contrary, dispose of me forever, and put me out of the way. Now, we must say nothing of this to my uncle, Captain Cuttle, but must make it out to be as favorable and as promising as we can; and when I tell you what it really is, I only do so, that in case any means should ever arise of lending me a hand, so far off, I may have one friend at home who knows my real situation."

"Wal'r, my boy," replied the Captain, "in the Proverbs of Solomon you will find the following words, 'May we never want a friend in need, nor a bottle to give him!' When found, make a note of."

Here the Captain stretched out his hand to Walter, with an air of downright good faith that spoke volumes; at the same time repeating (for he felt proud of the accuracy and pointed application of his quotation,) "When found, make a note of."

"Captain Cuttle," said Walter, taking the immense fist extended to him by the Captain in both his hands, which it completely filled, "next to my uncle Sol, I love you. There is no one on earth in whom I can more safely trust. I am sure. As to the mere going away, Captain Cuttle, I don't care for that; why should I care for that! If I were free to seek my own fortune—if I were free to go as a common sailor—if I were free to venture on my own account to the farthest end of the world—I would gladly go! I would have gladly gone, years ago, and taken my chance of what might come of it. But it was against my uncle's wishes, and against the plans he had formed for me; and there was an end of that. But what I feel, Captain Cuttle, is, that we have been a little mistaken all along, and that, so far as any improvement in my prospects is concerned, I am no better off now than I was when I first entered Dombey's House—perhaps a little worse, for the House may have been kindly inclined toward me then, and it certainly is not now."

"Turn again, Whittington," muttered the disconsolate Captain, after looking at Walter for some time.

"Ay!" replied Walter, laughing, "and turn a great many times, too, Captain Cuttle, I'm afraid, before such fortune as his ever turns up again. Not that I complain," he added, in his lively, animated, energetic way. "I have nothing to complain of. I am provided for. I can live. When I leave my uncle, I leave him to you; and I can leave him to no one better, Captain Cuttle. I haven't told you all this because I despair, not I; it's to convince you that I can't pick and choose in Dombey's House, and that where I am sent, there I must go, and what I am offered, that I must take. It's better for my uncle that I should be sent away; for Mr. Dombey is a valuable friend to him, as he proved himself, you know when, Captain Cuttle; and I am persuaded he won't be less valuable when he hasn't me there, every day, to awaken his dislike. So, hurrah for the West Indies, Captain Cuttle! How does that tune go that the sailors sing?

"For the Port of Barbados, boys!
Cheerily!
Leaving old England behind us, boys!
Cheerily!"

Here the Captain roared in chorus

"Oh cheerily, cheerily!
Oh cheer—i—ly!"

The last line reaching the quick ears of an ardent skipper not quite sober, who lodged opposite, and who instantly sprung out of bed, threw up his window, and joined in, across the street, at the top of his voice, produced a fine effect. When it was impossible to sustain the concluding note any longer, the skipper bellowed forth a terrific "ahoy!" intended in part as a friendly greeting, and in part to show that he was not at all breathed. That done, he shut down his window, and went to bed again.

"And now, Captain Cuttle," said Walter, handing him the blue coat and waistcoat, and bustling very much, "if you'll come and break the news to Uncle Sol, (which he ought to have known days upon days ago, by rights,) I'll leave you at the door, you know, and walk about until the afternoon."

The Captain, however, scarcely appeared to relish the commission, or to be by any means confident of his powers of executing it. He had arranged the future life and adventures of Walter so very differently, and so entirely to his own satisfaction; he had felicitated himself so often on the sagacity and foresight displayed in that arrangement, and had found it so complete and perfect in all its parts; that to suffer it to go to pieces all at once, and even to assist in breaking it up, required a great effort of his resolution. The Captain, too, found it difficult to unload his old ideas upon the subject, and to take a perfectly new cargo on board, with that rapidity which the circumstances required, or without jumbling and confounding the two. Consequently, instead of putting on his coat and waistcoat with anything like the impetuosity that could alone have kept pace with Walter's mood, he declined to invest himself with those garments at all at present; and informed Walter that on such a serious matter, he must be allowed to "bite his nails a bit."

"It's an old habit of mine, Wal'r," said the Captain, "any time these fifty year. When you see Ned Cuttle bite his nails, Wal'r, then you may know that Ned Cuttle's aground."

Thereupon the Captain put his iron hook between his teeth, as if it were a hand; and with an air of wisdom and profundity that was the very concentration and sublimation of all philosophical reflection and grave inquiry, applied himself to the consideration of the subject in its various branches.

"There's a friend of mine," murmured the Captain, in an absent manner, "but he's at present coasting round to Whitby, that would deliver such an opinion on this subject, or any other that could be named, as would give Parliament six and beat 'em. Been knocked overboard, that man," said the Captain "twice, and none the worse for it. Was beat in his apprenticeship, for three weeks (off and on,) about the head with a ringbolt. And yet a clearer-minded man don't walk."

In spite of his respect for Captain Cuttle, Walter could not help inwardly rejoicing at the absence of this sage, and devoutly hoping that his limpid intellect might not be brought to bear on his difficulties until they were quite settled.

"If you was to take and show that man the buoy at the Nore," said Captain Cuttle in the same tone, "and ask him his opinion of it, Wal'r, he'd give you an opinion that was no more like that buoy than your uncle's buttons are. There a'nt a man that walks—certainly not on *two* legs—that can come near him. Not near him!"

"What's his name, Captain Cuttle?" inquired Walter, determined to be interested in the Captain's friend.

"His name's Bunsby," said the Captain. "But Lord, it might be anything for the matter of that, with such a mind as his!"

The exact idea which the Captain attached to this concluding piece of praise, he did not farther elucidate; neither did Walter seek to draw it forth. For on his beginning to review, with the vivacity natural to himself and to his situation, the leading points in his own affairs, he soon discovered that the Captain had relapsed into his former profound state of mind; and that while he eyed him steadfastly from beneath his bushy eyebrows, he evidently neither saw nor heard him, but remained immersed in cogitation.

In fact, Captain Cuttle was laboring with such great designs, that far from being aground, he soon got off into the deepest of water, and could find no bottom to his penetration. By fits and degrees it became perfectly plain to the Captain that there was some mistake here; that it was undoubtedly much more likely to be Walter's mistake than his; that if there were really any West India scheme afoot, it was a very different one from what Walter, who was young and rash, supposed; and could only be some new device for making his fortune with unusual celerity. "Or if there should be any little hitch between 'em," thought the Captain, meaning between Walter and Mr. Dombey, "it only wants a word in season from a friend of both parties, to set it right and smooth, and make all taut again."—Captain Cuttle's deduction from these considerations was, that as he already enjoyed the pleasure of knowing Mr. Dombey, from having spent a very agreeable half hour in his company at Brighton (on the morning which they borrowed the money;) and that, as a couple of men of the world, who understood each other, and were mutually disposed to make things comfortable, could easily arrange any little difficulty of this sort, and come at the real facts; the friendly thing for him to do would be, without saying any thing about it to Walter at present, just to step up to Mr. Dombey's house—say to the servant "Would ye be so good, my lad, as report Cap'en Cuttle here?"—meet Mr. Dombey in a confidential spirit—hook him by the button-hole—talk it over—make it all right—and come away triumphant!

As these reflections presented themselves to the Captain's mind, and by slow degrees assumed this shape and form, his visage cleared like a doubtful morning when it gives place to a bright noon. His eyebrows, which had been in the highest degree portentous, smoothed their rugged bristling aspect, and became serene; his eyes, which had been nearly closed in the severity of his mental exercise, opened freely; a smile which had been at first but three specks—one at the right-hand corner of his mouth, and one at the corner of each eye—gradually overspread his whole face, and, rippling up into his forehead, lifted the glazed hat; as if that too had been aground with Captain Cuttle, and were now, like him, happily afloat again.

Finally, the Captain set off biting his nails, and said, "Now Wal'r, my boy, you may help me on with them slops." By which the Captain meant his coat and waistcoat.

Walter little imagined why the Captain was so particular in the arrangement of his cravat as to twist the pendent ends into a sort of pigtail, and pass them through a massive gold ring with a picture of a tomb upon it, and a neat iron railing, and a tree, in memory of some deceased friend. Nor why the Captain pulled up his shirt-collar to the utmost limits allowed by the Irish linen below, and by so doing decorated himself with a complete pair of blinkers; nor why he changed his shoes, and put on an unparalleled pair of ankle-jacks, which he only wore on extraordinary occasions. The Captain being at length attired to his own complete satisfaction, and having glanced at himself from head foot in a shaving-glass which he removed from a nail for that purpose, took up his knotted stick, and said he was ready.

The Captain's walk was more complacent than usual when they got out into the street; but this Walter supposed to be the effect of the ankle-jacks, and took little heed of. Before they had gone very far, they encountered a woman selling flowers; when the Captain stopping short, as if struck by a happy idea, made a purchase of the largest bundle in her basket: a most glorious nosegay, lan-shaped, some two feet and a half round, and composed of all the jolliest-looking flowers that blow.

Armed with this little token, which he designed for Mr. Dombey, Captain Cuttle walked on with Walter until they reached the Instrument-maker's door, before which they both paused.

"You're going in?" said Walter.

"Yes," returned the Captain, who felt that Walter must be got rid of before he proceeded any farther, and that he had better time his projected visit somewhat later in the day.

"And you won't forget anything?" said Walter.

"No," returned the Captain.

"I'll go upon my walk at once," said Walter, "and then I shall be out of the way, Captain Cuttle."

"Take a good long 'un, my lad!" replied the Captain, calling after him. Walter waved his hand in assent and went his way.

His way was nowhere in particular, but he thought he would go out into the fields, where he could reflect upon the unknown life before him, and resting under some tree, ponder quietly. He knew no better fields than those near Hampstead, and no better means of getting at them than by passing Mr. Dombey's house.

It was as stately and as dark as ever, when he went by and glanced up at its frowning front. The blinds were all pulled down, but the upper windows stood wide open, and the pleasant air stirring those curtains and waving them to and fro, was the only sign of animation in the whole exterior. Walter walked softly as he passed, and was glad when he had left the house a door or two behind.

He looked back then; with the interest he had always felt for the place since the adventure of the lost child, years ago; and looked especially at those upper windows. While he was thus engaged, a chariot drove to the door, and portly gentleman in black, with a heavy watch-chain, alighted, and went in. When he afterward remembered this gentleman and his equipage together, Walter had no doubt he was a physician; and then he wondered who was ill; but the discovery did not occur to him until he had walked some distance, thinking listlessly of other things.

Though still, of what the house had suggested to him; for Walter pleased himself with thinking that perhaps the time might come, when the beautiful child who was his old friend and had always been so grateful to him and so glad to see him since, might interest her brother in his behalf and influence his fortunes for the better. He liked to imagine this—more, at that moment, for the pleasure of imagining her continued remembrance of him, than for any worldly profit he might gain; but another and more sober fancy whispered to him that if he were alive then, he would be beyond the sea and forgotten; she married, rich, proud, happy. There was no more reason why she should remember him with any interest in such an altered state of things, than any plaything she ever had. No, not so much.

Yet Walter so idealized the pretty child whom he had found wandering in the rough streets, and so identified her with her innocent gratitude of that night and the simplicity and truth of its expression, that he blushed for himself as a libeller, when he argued that she could ever grow proud.—On the other hand, his meditations were of that fantastic order that it seemed hardly less libelous in him to imagine her grown a woman; to think of her as anything but the same artless, gentle, winning little creature, that she had been in the days of Good Mrs. Brown. In a word, Walter found out that to reason with himself about Florence at all, was to become very unreasonable indeed; and that he could do no better than preserve her image in his mind as something precious, unattainable, unchangeable, and indefinite—indefinite in all but its power of giving him pleasure, and restraining him like an Angel's hand from anything unworthy.

It was a long stroll in the fields that Walter took that day, listening to the birds, and the Sunday bells, and the softened murmur of the town—breathing sweet scents; glancing sometimes at the dim horizon beyond which his voyage and his place of destination lay; then looking round on the green English grass and the home-landscape. But he hardly once thought, even of going away, distinctly, and seemed to put off reflection idly, from hour to hour, and from minute to minute, while he yet went on reflecting all the time.

Walter had left the fields behind him, and was plodding homeward in the same abstracted mood, when he heard a shout from a man, and then a woman's voice calling to him loudly by name. Turning quickly in his surprise, he saw that a hackney-coach, going in the contrary direction, had stopped at no great distance; that the coachman was looking back from his box, and making signals to him with his whip; and that a young woman inside was leaning out of the window, and beckoning with immense energy. Running up to this coach, he found that the young woman was Miss Nipper, and that Miss Nipper was in such a flutter as to be almost beside herself.

"Staggs's Gardens, Mr. Walter!" said Miss Nipper; "if you please, oh do!"

"Eh?" cried Walter; "what is the matter?"

"Oh, Mr. Walter, Staggs's Gardens, if you please!" said Susan.

"There!" cried the coachman, appealing to Walter, with a sort of exulting despair; "that's the way the young lady's been a goin' on for up'ards of a mortal hour, and me continually backing out of no-thoroughfares, where she *would* drive up.—I've had a many fares in this coach first and last, but never such a fare as her."

"Do you want to go to Staggs's Gardens, Susan?" inquired Walter.

"Ah! She wants to go there! WHERE IS IT?" growled the coachman.

"I don't know where it is!" exclaimed Susan, wildly. "Mr. Walter, I was there once myself, along with Miss Floy and our own poor darling Master Paul, on the very day when you found Miss Floy in the city, for we lost her coming home. Mrs. Richards and me, and a mad bull, and Mrs. Richards's eldest, and though I went there afterward, I can't remember where it is. I think it's sunk into the ground, oh, Mr. Walter, don't desert me, Staggs's Gardens, if you please! Miss Floy's darling—all our darlings—little, meek, meek Master Paul! Oh Mr. Walter!"

"Good God!" cried Walter. "Is he very ill?"

"The pretty flower!" cried Susan, wringing her hands, "has took the fancy that he'd like to see his old nurse, and I've come to bring her to his bedside. Mrs. Stagg, of Polly Toodles's Gardens, some one pray!"

Greatly moved by what he heard, and catching Susan's earnestness immediately, Walter, now that he understood the nature of her errand, dashed into it with such ardor that the coachman had enough to do to follow closely as he ran before, inquiring here and there and everywhere, the way to Staggs's Gardens.

There was no such place as Staggs's Gardens. It had vanished from the earth. Where the old rotten summer-houses once stood, palaces now reared their heads, and granite columns of gigantic girth opened a vista to the railway world beyond. The miserable waste ground, where the refuse-matter had been heaped of yore, was swallowed up and gone; and in its frowsy stead were tiers of warehouses, crammed with rich goods and costly merchandise. The old by-streets now swarmed with passengers and vehicles of every kind; the new streets that had stopped disheartened in the mud and wagon-ruts, formed towns within themselves, originating wholesome comforts and conveniences belonging to themselves, and never tried nor thought of until they sprung into existence. Bridges that had led to nothing, led to villas, gardens, churches, healthy public walks. The carcasses of houses, and beginnings of new thoroughfares, had started off upon the line at steam's own speed, and shot away into the country in a monster train.

As to the neighborhood which had hesitated to acknowledge the railroad in its struggling days, that had grown wise and penitent as any Christian might in such a case, and now boasted of its powerful and prosperous relation. There were railway patterns in its drapers' shops, and railway journals in the windows of its newsmen. There were railway hotels, coffee houses, lodging-houses, boarding-houses; railway-plans, maps, views, wrappers, bottles, sandwich-boxes, and time-tables; railway hackney-coach and cab-stands; railway omnibuses, railway streets and buildings, railway hangers-on and parasites, and flatterers out of all calculation. There was even railway time observed in clocks, as if the sun itself had given in. Among the vanquished was the master chimney sweeper, whilom incredulous at Staggs's Gardens, who now lived in a stuccoed house three stories high, and gave himself out, with golden flourishes upon a varnished board, as contractor for the cleansing of the railway chimneys by machinery.

To and from the heart of this great change, all day and night, throbbing currents rushed and returned incessantly like its life's blood. Crowds of people and mountains of goods, departing and arriving scores upon scores of times in every four-and-twenty hours, produced a fermentation in the place that was always in action. The very houses seemed disposed to pack up and take trips. Wonderful Members of Parliament, who, little more than twenty years before, had made themselves merry with the wild railroad theories of engineers, and given them the liveliest rubs in cross-examination, went down into the North with their watches in their hands, and sent on messages before by the electric telegraph, to say that they were coming. Night and day the conquering engines rumbled at their distant work, or, advancing smoothly to their journey's end, and gilding like tame dragons into the allotted corners grooved out to the inch for their reception, stood bubbling and trembling there, making the walls quake, as if they were dilating with the secret knowledge of great powers yet unsuspected in them, and strong purposes not yet achieved.

But Staggs's Gardens had been cut up root and branch. Oh wo the day! when "not a rood of English ground"—said out in Staggs's Gardens—is secure!

At last, after much fruitless inquiry, Walter, followed by the coach and Susan, found a man who had once resided in that vanished land, and who was no other than the master sweep before referred to, grown stout, and knocking a double knock at his own door. He knowed Toodle, he said, well. Belonged to the Railroad, didn't he?

"Yes, Sir, yes!" cried Susan Nipper from the coach window.

Where did he live now? hastily inquired Walter.

He lived in the Company's own Buildings, second turning to the right, down the yard, cross over, and take the second on the right again. It was number eleven; they could n't mistake it; but if they did, they had only to ask for Toodle, Engine Fireman, and any one would show them which was his house. At this unexpected stroke of success, Susan Nipper dismounted from the coach with all speed, took Walter's arm, and set off at a breathless pace on foot; leaving the coach there to await their return.

"Has the little boy been long ill, Susan?" inquired Walter, as they hurried on.

"Ailing for a deal of time, but no one knew how much," adding, with excessive sharpness, "Oh them Blimbers!"

"Blimbers!" echoed Walter.

"I could n't forgive myself at such a time as this, Mr. Walter," said Susan, "and when there's so much serious distress to think about, if I rested hard on any one, especially on them that little darling Paul speaks well of, but I *may* wish that the family was set to work in a stony soil, to make new roads, and that Miss Blimber went in front and had the pickax!"

Miss Nipper then took breath, and went on faster than before, as if this extraordinary aspiration had relieved her. Walter, who had by this time no breath of his own to spare, hurried along without asking any more questions; and they soon, in their impatience, burst in at a little door and came into a clean parlor full of children.

"Where's Mrs. Richards?" exclaimed Susan Nipper, looking round. "Oh Mrs. Richards, Mrs. Richards, come along with me, my dear creeture!"

"Why, if it an't Susan!" cried Polly, rising with her honest face and motherly figure from among the group, in great surprise.

"Yes, Mrs. Richards, it's *she*," said Susan, "and I wish it was n't, though I may not seem to flatter when I say so, but little Master Paul is very ill, and told his Pa to-day that he would like to see the face of his old nurse, and him and Miss Floy hope you'll come along with me—and Mr. Walter Mrs. Richards—forgetting what is past, and do a kindness to the sweet dear that is withering away. Oh, Mrs. Richards, withering away!" Susan Nipper crying, Polly shed tears to see her, and to hear what she had said; and all the children gathered round (including numbers of new babies); and Mr. Toodle, who had just come home from Birmingham, and was eating his dinner out of a basin, laid down his knife and fork, and put on his wife's bonnet and shawl for her, which were hanging up behind the door; then tapped her on the back; and said, with more fatherly feeling than eloquence, "Polly! cut away!"

So they got back to the coach, long before the coachman expected them; and Walter putting Susan and Mrs. Richards inside, took his seat on the box himself that there might be no more mistakes, and deposited them safely in the hall of Mr. Dombey's house—where, by the bye, he saw a mighty nosegay lying, which reminded him of the one Captain Cuttle had purchased in his company that morning. He would have lingered to know more of the young invalid, or waited any length of time to see if he could render the least service; but, painfully sensible that such conduct would be looked upon by Mr. Dombey as presumptuous and forward, he turned slowly, sadly, anxiously away.

He had not gone five minutes' walk from the door, when a man came running after him, and begged him to return. Walter retraced his steps as quickly as he could, and entered the gloomy house with a sorrowful foreboding.

CHAPTER XVI.

What the waves were always saying.

Paul had never risen from his little bed. He lay there, listening to the noises in the street, quite tranquilly; not caring much how the time went, but watching it and watching everything about him with observing eyes.

When the sunbeams struck into his room through the rustling blinds, and quivered on the opposite wall like golden water, he knew that evening was coming on, and that the sky was red and beautiful. As the reflection died away, and a gloom went creeping up the wall, he watched it deepen, deepen, deepen, into night. Then he thought how the long streets were dotted with lamps, and how the peaceful stars were shining overhead. His fancy had a strange tendency to wander to the river, which he knew was flowing through the great city; and now he thought how black it was, and how deep it would look, reflecting the hosts of stars—and more than all, how steadily it rolled away to meet the sea.

As it grew later in the night, and footsteps in the street became so rare that he could hear them coming, count them as they passed, and lose them in the hollow distance, he would lie and watch the many-colored ring about the candle, and wait patiently for day. His only trouble was, the swift and rapid river. He felt forced, sometimes, to try to stop it—to stem it with his childish hands—or choke its way with sand—and when he saw it coming on, resistless, he cried out! But a word from Florence, who was always at his side, restored him to himself; and leaning his poor head upon her breast, he told Floy of his dream, and smiled.

When day began to dawn again, he watched for the sun; and when its cheerful light began to sparkle in the room, he pictured to himself—pictured! he saw—the high church towers rising up into the morning sky, the town reviving, waking, starting into life once more, the river glistening as it rolled (but rolling fast as ever,) and the country bright with dew. Familiar sounds and cries came by degrees into the street below; the servants in the house were roused and busy; faces looked in at the door, and voices asked his attendants softly how he was. Paul always answered for himself, "I am better. I am a great deal better, thank you! Tell Papa so!"

By little and little, he got tired of the bustle of the day, the noise of carriages and carts, and people passing and re-passing; and would fall asleep, or be troubled with restless and uneasy sense again—the child could hardly tell whether this were in his sleeping or his waking moments—of that rushing river. "Why, will it never stop, Floy?" he would sometimes ask her. "It is bearing me away, I think!"

But Floy could always soothe and reassure him