

IV.

FURNIVAL'S INN, Holborn, with its parallelogram of dusty or rain-washed cobble-stones unrelieved by any patch of railed-in grass plot, where sooty lilacs and rusty hawthorns make a show of putting forth green leaves in Spring, and plane-trees shed their bark, as boa-constrictors doff their skins—at the approach of Winter—Furnival's Inn, even in the year of stress 1870—impressed itself upon the casual visitor as a dismal spot in wet weather and a dusty one in dry. But that an immortal genius wrote a deathless work of humour in its cheerless precincts, one would have said that nothing young or gay or natural could ever flourish there.

At nine o'clock upon the morning of a day heavily fraught with Fate for the protagonist of this unpretending life-drama, recent puddles testified to overnight's rain, and gray clouds rushing north-westward across a monochromatic parallelogram of sky, framed in by the bilious-hued, grimy-windowed, decrepit-looking Inn buildings, predicted more presently.

Punctually upon the stroke of the hour you might have seen a shaggy young man in a red-hot hurry plunge under the round-topped carriage archway, eschewing the smaller side-entrance intended for pedestrians. Whereat the upper half of a porter, crowned with a tarred chimney-pot hat, and wearing a brown livery with copper-gilt buttons, appeared at the wicket of his lodge-door, and the fresh-faced, shaggy-haired boy in the battered felt wideawake and well-worn frieze overcoat, had felt an eye boring hard into his back, as, after one doubtful glance about him, he dived between the gouty Corinthian columns of the fourth portico on the left-hand side, and rang the first-floor bell.

"I'd ring if I was you!" the porter had soliloquised,