

"No, sir. I interested myself in the recovery of the instrument, believing that her hand was already pledged to one who has a thousand times the claims upon her gratitude and, if I mistake not, upon her heart, that I or any other man can ever urge. In this it seems I judged hastily."

"As you always do, sir," cried brother Charles, utterly forgetting his assumed dignity, "as you always do. How dare you think, Frank, that we would have you marry for money, when youth, beauty, and every amiable virtue and excellence, were to be had for love? How dared you, Frank, go and make love to Mr. Nickleby's sister without telling us first, what you meant to do, and letting us speak for you?"

"I hardly dared to hope—"

"You hardly dared to hope! Then, so much the greater reason for having our assistance! Mr. Nickleby, sir, Frank, although he judged hastily, judged, for once, correctly. Madeline's heart is occupied. Give me your hand, sir; it is occupied by you, and worthily and naturally. This fortune is destined to be yours, but you have a greater fortune in her, sir, than you would have in money were it forty times told. She chooses you, Mr. Nickleby. She chooses as we, her dearest friends, would have her choose. Frank chooses as we would have *him* choose. He should have your sister's little hand, sir, if she had refused it a score of times; ay, he should, and he shall! You acted nobly, not knowing our sentiments, but now you know them, sir, you must do as you are bid. What! You are the children of a worthy gentleman! The time was, sir, when my dear brother Ned and I were two poor simple-hearted boys, wandering, almost barefoot, to seek our fortunes; are we changed in anything but years and worldly circumstances since that time? No, God forbid! Oh, Ned, Ned, Ned, what a happy day this is for you and me! If our poor mother had only lived to see us now, Ned, how proud it would have made her dear heart at last!"

Thus apostrophised, brother Ned who had entered with Mrs. Nickleby, and who had been before unobserved by the young men, darted forward, and fairly hugged brother Charles in his arms.

"Bring in my little Kate," said the latter, after a short silence. "Bring her in, Ned. Let me see Kate, let me kiss her. I have a right to do so now; I was very near it when