

"Don't leave me please don't," said Emma Harding, "I see you're kind and good, and you shall be made as comfortable as possible."

"And I won't leave you, my pretty dear, said Mrs. Boss "make up your mind to that. As, many a time, the doctor has said to me,—Boss, you're worth your weight in gold—which it's not for me to say that I am; but I won't leave you, my lamb, till you can go strong about the house."

The doctor, who had been talking with Harding below-stairs, now came in. Harding remained in Mrs. Merrythought's room, surrounded by an army of children, and took a cup of tea and a mutton chop with her husband, who, being the father of eight, did his best to entertain his fellow-lodger; whom he now met for the first time.

"A man," he said, "is naturally pulled down at these times. I was, myself, with all my eight. Jack, you dog, let the cat alone—(this, parenthetically, to the third, who was always a graceless urchin with a cat.) Tom, if you suck your thumb, I'll put you to bed—(this to the seventh.) You know, Mr. Harding, a man that can feel at all, must feel on such occasions. What do you say to a pipe?"

"Thank ye," returned Harding, "I'll smoke one."

"I think," remarked Merrythought, reaching his tobacco, "that of all animals,—and they tell us that man is an animal—we are the most dependent. There's my Joe, there the eldest—he's twelve years old, and not able to help himself yet, and won't properly those four or five years." Joseph Merrythought hung down his head, as if his helplessness were a crime. "But, there, for that matter," his father added "if you come to philosophy, I don't know where you may end. That philosophy bothers me, Mr. Harding."

"Yes, very likely," said Harding who was not much interested.

"Oh, but it does, though," proceeded Merrythought, who wished to consider himself contradicted. "How shall we account for a whale's not being a fish, eh? And yet, they tell us, it isn't one. Now, can you answer that?"

"I can't, indeed," replied Harding, who was disinclined to talk.

"If we come to philosophy, we had need light two candles, for we shan't see with one, I can tell you. I have dipped into those things, I have. Have you been much of a reader, Mr. Harding?"

"Yes,—pretty well—tolerable," yawned poor William who was getting sadly tired of his host's conversation.

But he had to endure it for an hour longer, at the expiration of which period Mrs. Merrythought ran into the room, and bade him bless the stars, for it was all over and the girl—a girl it was—was such a little love. The young father hurried off to see his baby and then bethought himself of getting a bed out.

After deducting recent expenses, and redeeming his own and wife's garments from the pawnbrokers, Harding found himself, in a month's time, possessed of thirty-eight pounds. With thirty-eight pounds, you may go, on seven hundred and sixty occasions, to the pit of Sadler's Wells Theatre, and see Shakespeare played from the restored text. If you have only thirty-eight pounds in the world, I don't think that would be the best way of spending it. Harding proposed twenty schemes for profitably investing that very moderate sum, but he could not satisfy himself with any one of them. He at last determined to advertise in the newspapers for an engagement as a Classical Tutor; and while awaiting the result, to fall back upon his fortune.

Accordingly, the readers of the *Times* were one morning informed that a gentleman, thoroughly competent to instruct in the advanced classics, and conversant with the higher mathematics, was open to an engagement. The next day, Harding, calling at the library to which, as signified in the advertisement, letters were to be addressed, found a letter, which, upon perusal, he pronounced to be satisfactory. He was yet more satisfied, when he visited the writer on the following morning, and was engaged as an instructor in the Classics, without preamble or delay. The party with whom he treated was a youth of nineteen or thereabouts, who announced himself as his own master, and independent of all control.

"I am an aspirant, Mr. Harding," he said. "I have not been badly educated, but I want finishing off. I think you are just the person I want. Don't think me rude, if at this

early stage of our acquaintance, I ask you what your politics are, and what are your views of humanity?"

Harding did not immediately reply, for he was puzzled. There was about this youth, who proclaimed himself independent of all authority, such a coolness of procedure—such an assumption of superiority, which, while it did not offend him—it was too delicate and refined for that—took him greatly aback when he looked at the other's beardless face.

"I am liberal in my opinions," he said, presently, "but I never speak of my politics where they are not agreeable."

"You are liberal in your opinions," returned the youth. "Then we are friends. I am a Radical, and something more, Mr. Harding."

Harding replied that he was glad—he did not know what to say.

"I write," proceeded the youth.

"Indeed," remarked Harding.

"And publish," the other rejoined, "under the signature of Philo-Junius."

"I—I am not familiar with your—"

"With my writings. I suppose not. They appear in a penny weekly publication, called, 'The Startler.' It isn't much, but it possesses a merit, as being the herald of the People's Press. Startling publications will appear in scores by-and-bye. We have no People's Newspaper yet—we shall, hereafter, have one. There may be a hard struggle to establish it, but it will come, and it will utter stern truth."

Harding had been distressed for the bread that is so difficult to get, and his young wife had hanged her head, and they had known much sorrow. He had almost denied principle and forsaken honesty in his trials. He had confessed to his father, that honesty was good, while it could be adhered to, but must be parted with on an emergency. In the presence of this young enthusiast he felt shame and contrition. Boldero—for such was the youth's name, only needed encouragement to enter, at length, into his view of the future. The tutor and the pupil had much rich discourse that day, and at parting, they believed each other's destination to be that of a glorious Reformer. One had been twenty-two years in the world, and the other, nineteen, and they believed in the perfectibility of human nature. Fools!

Which was to be pupil, and which the tutor?

CHAPTER V.



MR. PEASNAP'S Christmas party had proved a failure. The beef was over-roasted—burnt as Mrs. Peasnap avowed, even to tears, to a kitchen cinder; and the pudding, owing to an accident it met with in the pot, was broken into fragments and watery. The guests, not relishing their dinner, were gloomy. Peasnap's jokes scarcely excited a smile. The port was muddy, and the brandy, obtained in lieu of a debt, was British and fiery. The sherry was pronounced thin, and even the veteran drinkers preferred gooseberry negus, of which they sipped a thimbleful every half-hour till tea-time. The holly-berries were pale contrasted with the hue of Mrs. Peasnap's indignant cheeks.

Hence it was that Mrs. Peasnap resolved to give another party, which should prove a triumph, and efface all remembrance of the Christmas mishap. Her husband went into the city and made a treaty with a wine-merchant. Claret and champagne, in limited quantities, was the result; and Peasnap, encouraged by his wife, even went to such lengths as to hire a frosted silver claret-jug and finger-glasses. Moreover, he engaged Chimpanzee, the celebrated comic singer, and Maudlin, who excelled in sentimental recitative.

Emma Harding was a proud little woman when she received a note sealed with two beak-embracing doves, and containing an invitation to Mrs. Peasnap's Ladyday party for herself and husband. Going, indeed, was out of the question, unless William hinted at the long-promised satin dress, which he did that night, and bade her buy it the next morning.

The satin purchased, and "made-up" by no second-hand hand, the next consideration was the baby. Could Mrs. Boss spare one night from her ordinary avocations?

The afternoon of the Peasnap party arrived, and brought with it Mrs. Boss. It was not without some irresolution, however, that Emma resigned the infant to her care. She