

More moved himself than he had been yet, he expressed in a few hurried words—as expressive perhaps as the most eloquent phrases—his devotion to the brothers, and his hope that he might live and die in their service.

To all this, brother Charles listened in profound silence, and with his chair so turned from Nicholas that his face could not be seen. He had not spoken either in his accustomed manner, but with a certain stiffness and embarrassment very foreign to it. Nicholas feared he had offended him. He said, "No—no—he had done quite right," but that was all.

'Frank is a heedless, foolish fellow,' he said, after Nicholas had paused for some time, 'a very heedless, foolish fellow. I will take care that this is brought to a close without delay. Let us say no more upon the subject; it's a very painful one to me. Come to me in half an hour, I have strange things to tell you, my dear Sir, and your uncle has appointed this afternoon for your waiting upon him with me.'

Ralph Nickleby slunk away from the interview, in which the dreadful tidings respecting his son were related, and he discovered that he had helped to hunt his only child to death; the following powerful passage describes his

DESPAIR AND SUICIDE.

"Creeping from the house and slinking off like a thief: groping with his hands when he first got into the street as if he were a blind man, and looking often over his shoulder while he hurried away, as though he were followed in imagination or reality by some one anxious to question or detain him, Ralph Nickleby left the city behind him and took the road to his own home.

The night was dark, and a cold wind blew, driving the clouds furiously and fast before it. There was one black, gloomy mass that seemed to follow him; not hurrying in the wild chase with the others, but lingering sullenly behind, and gliding darkly and stealthily on. He often looked back at this, and more than once stopped to let it pass over; but somehow, when he went forward again it was still behind him, coming mournfully and slowly up like a shadowy funeral train.

He had to pass a poor, mean burial ground—a dismal place raised a few feet above the level of the street, and parted from it by a low parapet wall and iron railing; a rank, unwholesome, rotten spot, where the very grass and weeds seemed, in their frowsy growth, to tell that they had sprung from paupers' bodies, and struck their roots in the graves of men, sodden in steaming courts and drunken hungry dens. And here in truth they lay, parted from the living by a little earth and a board or two—lay thick and close—corrupting in body as they had in mind; a dense and squalid crowd. Here they lay cheek by jowl with life: no deeper than the feet of the throng that passed there every day, and piled high as their throats. Here they lay, a grisly family, all those dear departed brothers and sisters of the ruddy clergyman who did his task so speedily when they were hidden in the ground!

As he passed here, Ralph called to mind that he had been one of a jury long before, on the body of a man who had cut his throat, and that he was buried in this place. He could not tell how he came to recollect it now, when he had so often passed and never thought about him, or how it was that he felt an interest in the circumstance, but he did both, and stopping, and clasping the iron railing with his hands, looked eagerly in, wondering which might be his grave.

While he was thus engaged, there came towards him, with noise of shouts and singing, some fellows full of drink, followed by others, who were remonstrating with them and urging them to go home in quiet. They were in high good humour, and one of them, a little, weazen, humpbacked man, began to dance. He was a grotesque, fantastic figure, and the few by-standers laughed. Ralph himself was moved to mirth, and echoed the laugh of one who stood near and who looked round in his face. When they had passed on and he was left alone again, he resumed his speculation with a new kind of interest, for he recollected that the last person who had seen the suicide alive had left him very merry, and he remembered how strange he and the other jurors had thought that at the time.

He could not fix upon the spot among such a heap of graves, but he conjured up a strong and vivid idea of the man himself, and how he looked, and what had led him to do it, all of which he recalled with ease. By dint of dwelling upon this theme, he carried the impression with him when he went away, as he remembered when a child to have had frequently before him the figure of some goblin he had once seen chalked upon a door. But as he drew nearer and nearer home he forgot it again, and began to think how very dull and solitary the house would be inside.

This feeling became so strong at last, that when he reached his own door, he could hardly make up his mind to turn the key and open it—when he had done that and gone into the passage, he felt as though to shut it again would be to shut out the world. But he let it go, and it closed with a loud noise. There was no light. How very dreary, cold, and still it was!

Shivering from head to foot he made his way up stairs into the room where he had been last disturbed. He had made a kind of compact with himself that he would not think of what had hap-

pened until he got home. He was at home now, and suffered himself for the first time to consider it.

His own child—his own child! He never doubted the tale; he felt it was true, knew it as well now as if he had been privy to it all along. His own child! And dead too. Dying beside Nicholas—loving him, and looking upon him as something like an angel! That was the worst.

They had all turned from him and deserted him in his very first need, even money could not buy them now; everything must come out, and everybody must know all. Here was the young lord dead, his companion abroad and beyond his reach, ten thousand pounds gone at one blow, his plot with Gride overset at the moment of triumph, his after schemes discovered, himself in danger, the object of his persecution and Nicholas's love, his own wretched boy; everything crumbled and fallen upon him, and he beaten down beneath the ruins and grovelling in the dust.

If he had known his child to be alive, if no deceit had been ever practised and he had grown up beneath his eye, he might have been a careless, indifferent, rough, harsh father—like enough—he felt that; but the thought would come that he might have been otherwise, and that his son might have been a comfort to him and they too happy together. He began to think now, that his supposed death and his wife's flight had had some share in making him the morose, hard man he was. He seemed to remember a time when he was not quite so rough and obdurate, and almost thought he had at first hated Nicholas because he was so young and gallant, and perhaps like the stripling who had brought dishonour and loss of fortune on his head.

But one tender thought, or one of natural regret in that whirlwind of passion and remorse, was as a drop of calm water in a stormy maddened sea. His hatred of Nicholas had been fed upon his own defeat, nourished on his interference with his schemes, fattened upon his old defiance and success. There were reasons for its increase; it had grown and strengthened gradually. Now it attained a height which was sheer wild lunacy. That his of all others should have been the hands to rescue his miserable child, that he should have been his protector and faithful friend, that he should have shown him that love and tenderness which from the wretched moment of his birth he had never known, that he should have taught him to hate his own parent and execrate his very name, that he should know and feel all this and triumph in the recollection, was gall and madness to the usurer's heart. The dead boy's love for Nicholas, and the attachment of Nicholas to him, was insupportable agony. The picture of his death-bed, with Nicholas at his side tending and supporting him, and he breathing out his thanks, and expiring in his arms, when he would have had them mortal enemies and hating each other to the last, drove him frantic. He gnashed his teeth and smote the air, and looking wildly round with eyes which gleamed through the darkness, cried aloud: 'I am trampled down and ruined. The wretch told me true. The night has come. Is there no way to rob them of further triumph, and spurn their mercy and compassion? Is there no devil to help me?'

Swiftly there glided into his brain the figure he had raised that night. It seemed to lie before him. The head was covered now. So it was when he first saw it. The rigid, upturned, marble feet too, he remembered well. Then came before him the pale and trembling relatives who had told their tale upon the inquest—the shrieks of women—the silent dread of men—the consternation and disquiet—the victory achieved by that heap of clay which with one motion of its hand had let out the life and made this stir among them—

He spoke no more, but after a pause softly groped his way out of the room, and up the echoing stairs—up to the top—to the front garret—where he closed the door behind him, and remained—

It was a mere lumber-room now, but it yet contained an old dismantled bedstead: the one on which his son had slept, for no other had ever been there. He avoided it hastily, and sat down as far from it as he could.

The weakened glare of the lights in the street below, shining through the window which had no blind or curtain to intercept it, was enough to show the character of the room, though not sufficient fully to reveal the various articles of lumber, old cased trunks and broken furniture, which were scattered about. It had a shelving roof; high in one part, and at another almost descending to the floor. It was towards the highest part that Ralph directed his eyes, and upon it he kept them fixed steadily for some minutes, when he rose, and dragging thither an old chest upon which he had been seated, mounted upon it, and felt along the wall above his head with both hands. At length they touched a large iron hook firmly driven into one of the beams.

At that moment he was interrupted by a loud knocking at the door below. After a little hesitation he opened the window, and demanded who it was.

'I want Mr. Nickleby,' replied a voice.

'What with him?'

'That's not Mr. Nickleby's voice surely,' was the rejoinder.

It was not like it; but it was Ralph who spoke, and so he said. The voice made answer that the twin brothers wished to know whether the man whom he had seen that night was to be detained,

and that although it was now past midnight they had sent in their anxiety to do right.

'Yes,' cried Ralph, 'detain him till to-morrow; then let them bring him here—him and my nephew—and come themselves, and be sure that I will be ready to receive them.'

'At what hour?' asked the voice.

'At any hour,' replied Ralph fiercely. 'In the afternoon, tell them. At any hour—at any minute—all times will be alike to me.'

He listened to the man's retreating footsteps until the sound had passed, and then gazing up into the sky saw, or thought he saw, the same black cloud that had seemed to follow him home, and which now appeared to hover directly over the house.

'I know its meaning now,' he muttered, 'and the restless nights, the dreams, and why I have quailed of late;—all pointed to this. Oh! if men by selling their own souls could ride rampant for a term, for how short a term would I barter mine to-night!'

The sound of a deep bell came along the wind. One.

'Lie on!' cried the usurer, 'with your iron tongue; ring merrily for births that make expectants writhe, and marriages that are made in hell, and toll ruefully for the dead whose shoes are worn already. Call men to prayers who are godly because not found out, and ring chimes for the coming in of every year that brings this cursed world nearer to its end. No book or bell for me; throw me on a dunghill, and let me rot there to infect the air!'

With a wild look around, in which frenzy, hatred, and despair, were horribly mingled, he shook his clenched fist at the sky above him, which was still dark and threatening, and closed the window.

The rain and hail pattered against the glass, the chimneys quaked and rocked; the crazy casement rattled with the wind as tho' an impatient hand inside were striving to burst it open. But no hand was there, and it opened no more.

'How's this?' cried one, 'the gentlemen say they can't make anybody hear, and have been trying these two hours?'

'And yet he came home last night,' said another, 'for he spoke to somebody out of that window up stairs.'

They were a little knot of men, and the window being mentioned, went out in the road to look up at it. This occasioned their observing that the house was still close shut, as the housekeeper had said she had left it on the previous night, and led to a great many suggestions, which ended in two or three of the boldest getting round to the back and so entering by a window, while the others remained outside in impatient expectation.

They looked into all the rooms below, opening the shutters as they went to admit the fading light; and still finding nobody, and everything quiet and in its place, doubted whether they should go farther. One man, however, remarking that they had not yet been in the garret, and that it was there he had been last seen, they agreed to look there too, and went up softly, for the mystery and silence made them timid.

After they had stopped for an instant on the landing eyeing each other, he who had proposed their carrying the search so far turned the handle of the door, and pushing it open looked through the chink, and fell back directly.

'It's very odd,' he whispered, 'he's hiding behind the door! Look!'

They pressed forward to see, but one among them thrusting the others aside with a loud exclamation, drew a clasp knife from his pocket and dashing into the room cut down the body.

He had torn a rope from one of the old trunks and hung himself on an iron hook immediately below the trap door in the ceiling—in the very place to which the eyes of his son, a lonely, desolate, little creature, had so often been directed in childish terror four or five years before.'

(To be concluded in next number.)

"HEADS OF THE PEOPLE."

THE FARMER'S DAUGHTER.

Continued from page 371.

Dolly Cowcabbage.—It is not to be inferred, however, that all farmers' daughters are like Anne Field. Plentifully as Providence has scattered beauty and good sense through our farms and granges, both these and other good things are given with a difference. There are such things amongst farmers' daughters as ranks, fortunes, educations, dispositions, abilities, and taste, in as much variety as any lover of variety can desire. There are farmers of all sorts, from the duke to the man of twenty acres; and, of course, there are farmers' daughters of as many degrees. There is a large class of gentlemen-farmers—men of estates and capitals, who farm their two or three thousand acres, like some of the great corn-farmers of Northumberland; live in noble large houses, and keep their carriage and livery servants. Of course, the daughters of these, and such as these, are educated just the same, and have all the same habits and manners as any other young ladies. It is neither Cobbett, nor any other contemner of boarding-schools, and such "scimmy-dish things," that will persuade these damsels to leave the carriage for the tax-cart, the piano for the spinning-wheel, nor the fashionable novel for the