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NICHOLAS NICKLEBY.—No. 6.

[We continue our narrative of the hero of the popular work of 'Boz.' Nicholas arrived in London, makes his way to the house of Newman Noggs, the clerk of Ralph Nickleby. Among other topics of conversation, the following is introduced, with the letter of dear Miss Squeers, who had formerly felt a tender attachment for Nickleby.]

"The day before yesterday," said Newman, "your uncle received this letter. I took a hasty copy of it while he was out. Shall I read it?"

"If you please," replied Nicholas. Newman Noggs accordingly read as follows:—

*Dotheboys' Hall,
Thursday Morning.*

SIR,

"My pa requests me to write to you. The doctors considering it doubtful whether he will ever recover the use of his legs which prevents his holding a pen.

"We are in a state of mind beyond every thing, and my pa is in one mask of brooses both blue and green likewise two forms are steeped in his Goar. We were kimpelled to have him carried down into the kitchen where he now lays. You will judge from this that he has been brought very low.

"When your newew that you recommended for a teacher had done this to my pa and jumped upon his body with his feet and also langwedge which I will not pollewit my pen with describing, he assaulted my ma with dreadful violence, dashed her to the earth, and drove her back comb several inches into her head. A very little more and it must have entered her skull. We have a medical certifiket that if it had, the tortershell would have affected the brain.

"Me and my brother were then the victims of his feury since which we have suffered very much which leads us to the arrowing belief that we have received some injury in our insides, especially as no marks of violence are visible externally. I am screaming out loud all the time I write and so is my brother which takes off my attention rather, and I hope will excuse mistakes.

"The monster having satiated his thirst for blood ran away, taking with him a boy of desperate character, that he had excited to rebellyon, and a garnet ring belonging to my ma, and not having been apprehended by the constables is supposed to have been took up by some stage coach. My pa begs that if he comes to you the ring may be returned, and that you will let the thief and the assassin go, as if we prosecuted him he would only be transported, and if he is let go he is sure to be hung before long, which will save us trouble, and be much more satisfactory. Hoping to hear from you when convenient

"I remain

"Yours and cetera

"FANNY SQUEERS.

"P. S. I pity his ignorance and despise him."

Having thus furnished the reader with a beautiful specimen of a young lady's hate, we shall now introduce the whole of

CHAPTER XVI.

NICHOLAS SEEKS TO EMPLOY HIMSELF IN A NEW CAPACITY, AND BEING UNSUCCESSFUL, ACCEPTS AN ENGAGEMENT AS TUTOR IN A PRIVATE FAMILY.

The first care of Nicholas next morning was, to look after some room in which, until better times dawned upon him, he could contrive to exist without trenching upon the hospitality of Newman Noggs, who would have slept upon the stairs with pleasure, so that his young friend was accommodated.

The vacant apartment to which the bill in the parlour window bore reference, appeared on enquiry to be a small back room on the second floor reclaimed from the leads, and overlooking a soot-bespeckled prospect of tiles and chimney-pots. For the letting of this portion of the house from week to week, on reasonable terms, the parlour lodger was empowered to treat, he being deputed by the landlord to dispose of the rooms as they became vacant, and to keep a sharp look-out that the lodgers didn't run away. As a means of securing the punctual discharge of which last service he was permitted to live rent-free, lest he should at any time be tempted to run away himself.

Of this chamber Nicholas became the tenant; and having hired a few common articles of furniture from a neighbouring broker, and paid the first week's hire in advance, out of a small fund raised by the conversion of some spare clothes into ready money, he sat himself down to ruminate upon his prospects, which, like

that outside his window, were sufficiently confined and dingy. As they by no means improved on better acquaintance, and as familiarity breeds contempt, he resolved to banish them from his thoughts by dint of hard walking. So, taking up his hat, and leaving poor Smike to arrange and re-arrange the room with as much delight as if it had been the costliest palace, he betook himself to the streets, and mingled with the crowd which thronged them.

Although a man may lose a sense of his own importance when he is a mere unit among a busy throng, all utterly regardless of him, it by no means follows that he can dispossess himself, with equal facility, of a very strong sense of the importance and magnitude of his cares. The unhappy state of his own affairs was the one idea which occupied the brain of Nicholas, walk as fast as he would; and when he tried to dislodge it by speculating on the situation and prospects of the people who surrounded him, he caught himself in a few seconds contrasting their condition with his own, and gliding almost imperceptibly back into his old train of thought again.

Occupied in these reflections, as he was making his way along one of the great public thoroughfares of London, he chanced to raise his eyes to a blue board, whereon was inscribed in characters of gold, "General Agency Office; for places and situations of all kinds inquire within." It was a shop-front, fitted up with a gauze blind and an inner door; and in the window hung a long and tempting array of written placards, announcing vacant places of every grade, from a secretary's to a footboy's.

Nicholas halted instinctively before this temple of promise, and ran his eye over the capital-text openings in life which were so profusely displayed. When he had completed his survey he walked on a little way, and then back, and then on again; at length, after pausing irresolutely several times before the door of the General Agency Office, he made up his mind, and stepped in.

He found himself in a little floor-clothed room, with a high desk railed off in one corner, behind which sat a lean youth with cunning eyes and a protruding chin, whose performances in capital-text darkened the window. He had a thick ledger lying open before him, and with the fingers of his right hand inserted between the leaves, and his eyes fixed upon a very fat old lady in a mob-cap—evidently the proprietress of the establishment—who was airing herself at the fire, seemed to be only waiting her directions to refer to some entries contained within its rusty clasps.

As there was a board outside, which acquainted the public that servants-of-all-work were perpetually in waiting to be hired from ten till four, Nicholas knew at once that some half-dozen strong young women, each with pattens and an umbrella, who were sitting upon a form in one corner, were in attendance for that purpose, especially as the poor things looked anxious and weary. He was not quite so certain of the callings and stations of two smart young ladies who were in conversation with the fat lady before the fire, until—having sat himself down in a corner, and remarked that he would wait till the other customers had been served—the fat lady resumed the dialogue which his entrance had interrupted.

"Cook, Tom," said the fat lady, still airing herself as aforesaid.

"Cook," said Tom, turning over some leaves of the ledger.

"Well."

"Read out an easy place or two," said the fat lady.

"Pick out very light ones, if you please, young man," interposed a genteel female in shepherd's plaid boots, who appeared to be the client.

"Mrs. Marker," said Tom, reading, "Russel Place, Russell Square; offers eighteen guineas, tea and sugar found. Two in family, and see very little company. Five servants kept. No man. No followers."

"Oh Lor!" tittered the client. "That won't do. Read another, young man, will you?"

"Mrs. Wrymug," said Tom. "Pleasant Place, Finsbury. Wages, twelve guineas. No tea, no sugar. Serious family—"

"Ah! you needn't mind reading that," interrupted the client.

"Three serious footmen," said Tom, impressively.

"Three, did you say?" asked the client, in an altered tone.

"Three serious footmen," replied Tom. "Cook, housemaid, and nursemaid; each female servant required to join the Little Bethel Congregation three times every Sunday—with a serious footman. If the cook is more serious than the footman, she will be expected to improve the footman; if the footman is more serious than the cook, he will be expected to improve the cook."

"I'll take the address of that place," said the client; "I don't know but what it mightn't suit me pretty well."

"Here's another," remarked Tom, turning over the leaves; "Family of Mr. Gallanbile, M. P. Fifteen guineas, tea and sugar, and servants allowed to see male cousins, if godly. Note. Cold dinner in the kitchen on the Sabbath, Mr. Gallanbile being devoted to the Observance question. No victuals whatever cooked on the Lord's Day, with the exception of dinner for Mr. and Mrs. Gallanbile, which, being a work of piety and necessity is exempted. Mr. Gallanbile dines late on the day of rest, in order to prevent the sinfulness of the cook's dressing herself."

"I don't think that'll answer as well as the other," said the client, after a little whispering with her friend. "I'll take the other direction, if you please, young man. I can but come back again, if it don't do."

Tom made out the address, as requested, and the genteel client, having satisfied the fat lady with a small fee meanwhile, went away, accompanied by her friend.

As Nicholas opened his mouth to request the young man to turn to letter S, and let him know what secretaryships remained undisposed of, there came into the office an applicant, in whose favour he immediately retired, and whose appearance both surprised and interested him.

This was a young lady who could be scarcely eighteen, of very slight and delicate figure, but exquisitely shaped, who, walking timidly up to the desk, made an inquiry, in a very low tone of voice, relative to some situation as governess, or companion to a lady. She raised her veil for an instant, while she preferred the inquiry, and disclosed a countenance of most uncommon beauty, although shaded by a cloud of sadness, which in one so young was doubly remarkable. Having received a card of reference to some person on the books, she made the usual acknowledgment, and glided away.

She was neatly, but very quietly attired; so much so, indeed, that it seemed as though her dress, if it had been worn by one who imparted fewer graces of her own to it, might have looked poor and shabby. Her attendant—for she had one—was a red-faced, round-eyed, slovenly girl, who, from a certain roughness about the bare arms that peeped from under her dragged shawl, and the half-washed-out traces of smut and blacklead which tattooed her countenance, was clearly of a kin with the servants-of-all-work on the form, between whom and herself there had passed various grins and glances, indicative of the freemasonry of the craft.

The girl followed her mistress; and before Nicholas had recovered from the first effects of his surprise and admiration, the young lady was gone. It is not a matter of such complete and utter improbability as some sober people may think, that he would have followed them out, had he not been restrained by what passed between the fat lady and her book-keeper.

"When is she coming again, Tom?" asked the fat lady.

"To-morrow morning," replied Tom, mending his pen.

"Where have you sent her to?" asked the fat lady.

"Mrs. Clark's," replied Tom.

"She'll have a nice life of it, if she goes there," observed the fat lady, taking a pinch of snuff from a tin box.

Tom made no other reply than thrusting his tongue into his cheek, and pointing the feather of his pen towards Nicholas—reminders which elicited from the fat lady an inquiry of "Now, Sir, what can we do for you?"

Nicholas briefly replied that he wanted to know whether there was any such post as secretary or amanuensis to a gentleman to be had.

"Any such?" rejoined the mistress; "a dozen such. An't there, Tom?"

"I should think so," answered that young gentleman; and as he said it, he winked towards Nicholas with a degree of familiarity which he no doubt intended for a rather flattering compliment, but with which Nicholas was most ungratefully disgusted.

Upon reference to the book, it appeared that the dozen secretaryships had dwindled down to one. Mr. Greggsbury, the great member of parliament, of Manchester Buildings, Westminster, wanted a young man to keep his papers and correspondence in order; and Nicholas was exactly the sort of young man that Mr. Greggsbury wanted.

"I don't know what the terms are, as he said he'd settle them himself with the party," observed the fat lady; "but they must be pretty good ones, because he's a member of parliament."

Inexperienced as he was, Nicholas did not feel quite assured of