

out a pen, and then, taking a little ink-bottle from another pocket, he took out the cork and balanced it on the top of a china figure; then, securing the ink-bottle to one of the buttons of his coat by a little loop, he pulled out a long pocket-book, drew from it an elastic band with a snap, opened it, and fastened the leaves back with the band, just as a tall, gaunt, elderly man came in with a pen behind one ear, a pencil behind the other, making him look in profile like some peculiar kind of horned snail.

I watched their acts with boyish interest as they proceeded methodically to set down the contents of room after room, punching the chairs, turning up the settees, feeling the curtains, and tapping the mirrors, till at the end of the second day, all being done, they closed their books with a snap, nodded to me, and after a short chat with Mr. Rowle took their departure.

"Sale's on Toosday week," said that gentleman as I looked at him inquiringly. "What's going to be done o' you?"

"Done with me?" I said.

"Yes; where are you going to be?"

"I'm going to stop here," I said.

"That can't be, anyhow, young un. Haven't you got any friends?"

"Yes," I said; "there's Dick Wilmot, but he's at school."

"I say, young un, what a precious innocent you are! Haven't you never been away at school?"

"No, sir."

"Where have you been, then?"

"Here at home with papa and mamma."

"Lor', what a shame, to be sure! Why, you don't seem to know nothin'."

"Indeed I do," I said indignantly. "I can read, and write, and cipher, and I know a little botany, and Latin, and French, and papa was teaching me the violin."

"What, the fiddle? Well, that may be some use to you; but as for t'others, bah! I never found the want of any on 'em. How old are you?"

"Just turned eleven, sir."

"'Leven, and bless your 'art, young un, you're about as innocent as a baby."

"If you please, sir, I'm very sorry."

"Sorry? So am I. Why, up in London I've seen boys of 'leven as was reg'lar old men, and know'd a'most everything. Lookye here, young un, don't you know as your poor guv'nor died ever so much in debt through some bank breaking?"

"I heard poor papa say that the bank had shut its doors."

"That's right," said Mr. Rowle, nodding. "Well, young un, and don't you know what that means for you?"

"No, sir," I said.