

With these words, John Browdie opened the door himself, and opening his eyes too, to their utmost width, cried, as he clapped his hands together, and burst into a hearty roar:

"Ecod, it be the godfeyther, it be the godfeyther! Tilly, here be Misther Nickleby. Gi' us thee hond, mun. Coom awa', coom awa'. In wi' 'un, doon beside the fire; tak' a soop o' thot. Dinnot say a word till thou'st droonk it a'! Oop wi' it, mun. Ding! but I'm reeght glod to see thee."

Adapting his action to his text, John dragged Nicholas into the kitchen, forced him down upon a huge settle beside a blazing fire, poured out from an enormous bottle about a quarter of a pint of spirits, thrust it into his hand, opened his mouth and threw back his head as a sign to him to drink it instantly, and stood with a broad grin of welcome overspreading his great red face, like a jolly giant.

"I might ha' knowa'd," said John, "that nobody but thou would ha' coom wi' sike a knock as yon. Thot was the wa' thou knocked at schoolmeasther's door, eh? Ha, ha, ha! But I say; waa't be a' this about schoolmeasther?"

"You know it then?" said Nicholas.

"They were talking about it, doon toon, last neeght," replied John, "but neane on 'em seemed quite to un'erstan' it loike."

"After various shiftings and delays," said Nicholas, "he has been sentenced to be transported for seven years, for being in the unlawful possession of a stolen will; and, after that, he has to suffer the consequence of a conspiracy."

"Whew!" cried John, "a conspiracy! Soomat in the pooder plot wa'? Eh? Soomat in the Guy Faux line?"

"No, no, no, a conspiracy connected with his school; I'll explain it presently."

"Thot's reeght!" said John, "explain it arter breakfast, not noo, for thou bee'st hoongry, and so am I; and Tilly she mun' be at the bottom o' a' explanations, for she says thot's the mutual confidence. Ha, ha, ha! Ecod it's a room start, is the mutual confidence!"

The entrance of Mrs. Browdie, with a smart cap on and very many apologies for their having been detected in the act of breakfasting in the kitchen, stopped John in his discussion of this grave subject, and hastened the breakfast: which, being composed of vast mounds of toast, new-laid eggs, boiled ham, Yorkshire pie, and other cold substantials