SISSEY JUPE had not an easy time of it, between Mr. M'Choakumchild and Mrs. Gradgrind, and was not without strong impulses, in the first months of her probation, to run away. It hailed facts all day long so very hard, and life in general was opened to her as such a closely-ruled cyphering-book, that assuredly she would have run away, but for only one restraint.

It is lamentable to think of; but this restraint was the result of no arithmetical process, was self-imposed in defiance of all calculation, and went dead against any table of probabilities that any Actuary would have drawn up from the premises. The girl believed that her father had not deserted her; she lived in the hope that he would come back, and in the faith that he would be made the happier by her remaining where she was.

The wretched ignorance with which Jupe clung to this consolation, rejecting the superior comfort of knowing, on a sound arithmetical basis, that her father was an unnatural vagabond, filled Mr. Gradgrind with pity. Yet, what was to be done? M'Choakumchild reported that she had a very dense head for figures; that, once possessed with a general idea of the globe, she took the smallest conceivable interest in its exact measurements; that she was extremely slow in the acquisition of dates, unless some pitiful incident happened to be connected therewith; that she would burst into tears on being required (by the mental process) immediately to name the cost of two hundred and forty-seven muslin caps at fourteenpence halfpenny; that she was as low down, in the school, as low could be; that after eight weeks of induction into the elements of Political Economy, she had only yesterday been set right by a prattler three feet high, for returning to the question, “What is the first principle of this science?” the absurd answer, “To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me.”

Mr. Gradgrind observed, shaking his head, that all this was very bad; that it showed the necessity of infinite grinding at the mill of knowledge, as per system, schedule, blue book, report, and tabular statements A to Z; and that Jupe “must be kept to it.” So Jupe was kept to it, and became very low-spirited, but no wiser.

“It would be a fine thing to be you, Miss Louisa!” she said, one night, when Louisa had endeavoured to make her perplexities for next day something clearer to her.

“Do you think so?”

“I should know so much, Miss Louisa. All that is difficult to me now, would be so easy then.”

“You might not be the better for it, Sissy.”

Sissy submitted, after a little hesitation, “I should not be the worse, Miss Louisa.”

To which Miss Louisa answered, “I don’t know that.”

There had been so little communication between these two—both because life at Stone Lodge went monotonously round like a piece of machinery which discouraged human interference, and because of the prohibition relative to Sissy’s past career—that they were still almost strangers. Sissy, with her dark eyes wonderingly directed to Louisa’s face, was uncertain whether to say more or to remain silent.

“You are more useful to my mother, and more pleasant with her than I can ever be,” Louisa resumed. “You are pleasanter to yourself, than I am to myself.”

“But, if you please Miss Louisa,” Sissy pleaded, “I am—O so stupid!”

Louisa, with a brighter laugh than usual, told her she would be wiser by and by.

“You don’t know,” said Sissy, half crying, “what a stupid girl I am. All through school hours I make mistakes. Mr. and Mrs. M’Choakumchild call me up, over and over again, regularly to make mistakes. I can’t help them. They seem to come natural to me.”

“Mr. and Mrs. M’Choakumchild never make any mistakes themselves, I suppose, Sissy?”

“O no!” she eagerly returned. “They know everything.”

“Tell me some of your mistakes.”

“I am almost ashamed,” said Sissy, with reluctance. “But to-day, for instance, Mr. M’Choakumchild was explaining to us about Natural Prosperity.”
"National, I think it must have been," observed Louisa.

"Yes, it was,—But isn't it the same?" she timidly asked.

"You had better say, National, as he said so," returned Louisa, with her dry reserve.

"National Prosperity. And he said, Now, this schoolroom is a Nation. And in this nation, there are fifty millions of money. Isn't this a prosperous nation? Girl number twenty, isn't this a prosperous nation, and aren't you in a thriving state?"

"What did you say?" asked Louisa.

"Miss Louisa, I said I didn't know. I thought I couldn't know whether it was a prosperous nation or not, and whether I was in a thriving state or not, unless I knew who had got the money, and whether any of it was mine. But that had nothing to do with it. It was not in the figures at all," said Sissy, wiping her eyes.

"That was a great mistake of yours," observed Louisa.

"Yes, Miss Louisa, I know it was, now. Then Mr. M'Choakumchild said he would try me again. And he said, this schoolroom is an immense town, and in it there are a million of inhabitants, and only five-and-twenty are starved to death in the streets, in the course of a year. What is your remark on that proportion? And my remark was—for I thought it must be just as hard upon those who were starved, whether the others were a million, or a million million. And that was wrong too."

"Of course it was."

"Then Mr. M'Choakumchild said he would try me once more. And he said, Here are the statistics," said Louisa.

"Yes, Miss Louisa—they always remind me of stutterings, and that's another of my mistakes—of accidents upon the sea. And I find (Mr. M'Choakumchild said) that in a given time a hundred thousand persons went to sea on long voyages, and only five hundred of them were drowned or burnt to death. What is the percentage? And I said, Miss; here Sissy fairly sobbed as confessing with extreme contrition to her greatest error; "I said it was nothing."

"Nothing, Sissy?"

"Nothing, Miss—to the relations and friends of the people who were killed. I shall never learn," said Sissy. "And the worst of all is, that although my poor father wished me so much to learn, and although I am so anxious to learn because he wished me to, I am afraid I don't like it."

Louisa stood looking at the pretty modest head, as it drooped abashed before her, until it was raised again to glance at her face. Then she asked:

"Did your father know so much himself, that he wished you to be well taught too, Sissy?"
“And he liked them?” said Louisa, with her searching gaze on Sissy all this time.

“O very much! They kept him, many times, from what did him real harm. And often and often of a night, he used to forget all his troubles in wondering whether the Sultan would let the lady go on with the story, or would have her head cut off before it was finished.”

“And your father was always kind? To the last!” asked Louisa; contravening the great principle, and wondering very much.

“Always, always!” returned Sissy, clasping her hands. “Kinder and kinder than I can tell. He was angry only one night, and that was not to me, but Merrylegs. Merrylegs;” she whispered the awful fact; “is his performing dog.”

“Why was he angry with the dog?” Louisa demanded.

“Father, soon after they came home from performing, told Merrylegs to jump up on the backs of the two chairs and stand across them—which is one of his tricks. He looked at father, and didn't do it at once. Everything of father's had gone wrong that night, and he hadn't pleased the public at all. He cried out that the very dog knew he was failing, and had no compassion on him. Then he beat the dog, and was frightened, and said, 'Father, father! Pray don't hurt the creature who is so fond of you! O Heaven forgive you, father, stop!' And the dog was bloody, and the dog lay down crying on the floor with the dog in his arms, and the dog licked his face.”

Louisa saw that she was sobbing; and going to her, kissed her, took her hand, and sat down beside her.

“Finish by telling me how your father left you, Sissy. Now that I have asked you so much, tell me the end. The blame, if there is any blame, is mine: not yours.”

“Dear Miss Louisa,” said Sissy, covering her eyes, and sobbing yet; “I came home from the school that afternoon, and found poor father just come home too, from the fire, as if he was in pain. And I said, 'Have you hurt yourself, father?' (as he did sometimes, like they all did,) and he said, 'A little, my darling.' And when I came to stoop down and look up at his face, I saw that he was crying. The more I spoke to him, the more he hid his face; and at first he shook his head and said, 'No, Jupe, nothing of the sort,' the trembling of Sissy's lip would be repeated in Louisa's face, and her eyes would follow Sissy with compassion to the door. Mr. Gradgrind usually suspended the occupation of the moment, whatever it was, and looked for the reply as earnestly as Sissy did. And when Mr. Gradgrind regularly answered, "No, Jupe, nothing of the sort," the trembling of Sissy's lip would be repeated in Louisa's face, and her eyes would follow Sissy with compassion to the door. Mr. Gradgrind usually improved these occasions by remarking, when she was gone, that if Jupe had been properly trained from an early age she would have demonstrated to herself on sound principles the baselessness of these fantastic hopes. Yet it did seem (though not to him, for he
saw nothing of it) as if fantastic hope could take as strong a hold as Fact.
This observation must be limited exclusively to his daughter. As to Tom, he was becoming that not unprecedented triumph of calculation which is usually at work on number one.

As to Mrs. Gradgrind, if she said anything on the subject, she would come a little way out of her wrappers, like a feminine dormouse, and say:

"Good gracious bless me how my poor head is vexed and worried by that girl Jupe's so perseveringly asking, over and over again, about her tiresome letters! Upon my word and honour I seem to be fated, and destined, and ordained, to live in the midst of things that I am never to hear the last of. It really is a most extraordinary circumstance that it appears as if I never was to hear the last of anything!"

At about this point, Mr. Gradgrind's eye would fall upon her; and under the influence of that wintry piece of fact, she would become torpid again.

CHAPTER X.

I ENTERTAIN a weak idea that the English people are as hard-worked as any people upon whom the sun shines. I acknowledge to this ridiculous idiosyncrasy, as a reason why I would give them a little more play.

In the hardest working part of Coketown; in the innermost fortifications of that ugly citadel, where Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in; at the heart of the labyrinth of narrow courts upon courts, and close streets upon streets, which had come into existence piecemeal, every piece in a violent hurry for some one man's purpose, and the whole an unnatural family, shouldering, and trampling, and pressing one another to death; in the last close nook of this great exhausted receiver, where the chimneys, for want of air to make a draught, were built in an immense variety of stunted and crooked shapes, as though every house put out a sign of the kind of people who might be expected to be born in it; among the multitude of Coketown, generally called "the Hands,"—a race who would have found more favour with some people, if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands, or, like the lower creatures of the seashore, only hands and stomachs—lived a certain Stephen Blackpool, forty years of age.

Stephen looked older, but he had had a hard life. It is said that every life has its roses and thorns; there seemed, however, to have been a misadventure or mistake in Stephen's case, whereby somebody else had become possessed of his roses, and he had become possessed of the same somebody else's thorns in addition to his own. He had known, to use his words, a peck of trouble. He was usually called Old Stephen, in a kind of rough homage to the fact.

A rather stooping man, with a knitted brow, a pondering expression of face, and a hard-looking head sufficiently capacious, on which his iron-grey hair lay long and thin, Old Stephen might have passed for a particularly intelligent man in his condition. Yet he was not. He took no place among those remarkable "Hands," who, piecing together their broken intervals of leisure through many years, had mastered difficult sciences, and acquired a knowledge of most unlikely things. He held no station among the Hands who could make speeches at the Board of Trade debates. Thousands of his compoes could talk much better than he, at any time. He was a good power-loom weaver, and a man of perfect integrity. What more he was, or what else he had in him, if anything, let him show for himself.

The lights in the great factories, which looked, when they were illuminated, like Fairy palaces—or the travellers by express-train said so—were all extinguished; and the bells had rung for knocking off for the night, and had ceased again; and the Hands, men and women, boy and girl, were clattering home. Old Stephen was standing in the street, with the odd sensation upon him which the stoppage of the machinery always produced—the sensation of its having worked and stopped in his own head.

"Yet I don't see Rachael, still!" said he.

It was a wet night, and many groups of young women passed him, with their shawls drawn over their bare heads and held close under their chins to keep the rain out. He knew Rachael well, for a glance at any one of these groups was sufficient to show him that she was not there. At last, there were no more to come, and then he turned away, saying in a tone of disappointment, "Why, then, I ha' missed her!"

But, he had not gone the length of three streets, when he saw another of the shawled figures in advance of him, at which he looked so keenly that perhaps its mere shadow indistinctly reflected on the wet pavement—if he could have seen it without the figure itself moving along from lamp to lamp, brightening and fading as it went—would have been enough to tell him who was there. Making his pace at once much quicker and much softer, he darted on until he was very near this figure, then fell into his former walk, and called "Rachael!"

She turned, being then in the brightness of a lamp; and raising her hood a little, showed a quiet oval face, dark and rather delicate, irradiated by a pair of very gentle eyes, and further set off by the perfect order of her shining black hair. It was not a face in its first bloom; she was a woman five and thirty years of age.

"Ah, lad! "Tis thou?" when she had said this, with a smile which would have been quite expressed, though nothing of her had been seen but her pleasant eyes, she replaced her hood again, and they went on together.
"I thought thou wast abind me, Rachael?"
"No."
"'Early t'night, lass?"
"'Times I'm a little early, Stephen; times a little late. I'm never to be counted on, going home."
"Nor going t'other way, neither, 't seems to me, Rachael?"
"No, Stephen."

He looked at her with some disappointment in his face, but with a respectful and patient conviction that she must be right in whatever she did. The expression was not lost upon her; she laid her hand lightly on his arm a moment, as if to thank him for it.

We are such true friends, lad, and such old friends, and getting to be such old folk, no." No, Rachael, thou'rt as young as ever thou wast."

"One of us would be puzzled how to get old, Stephen, without t'other getting so too, both being alive," she answered, laughing; "but, any ways, we're such old friends, that 't'hide a word of honest truth fra 'one another thou wast."

"Never fret about them, Stephen," she answered quickly, and not without an anxious glance at his face. "Let the laws be."

"'Twould be hard, indeed, if 'twas not to be at all," she said, with a cheerfulness she sought to communicate to him.

"'Tis hard, anyways, Rachael."

"Try to think not; and 'twill seem better."

"I've tried a long time, and 't'a'n't got better. But thou'rt right; 't'might make folk talk, even of thee. Thou hast been that to me, Rachael, through so many year: thou hast done me so much good, and heartened me in that cheering way; that thy word is a law to me. Ah lass, and a bright good law! Better than some real ones."

"No, Stephen; 'times I'm a little early, Stephen; 'times I thought thou wast ahind me, Eachael!"

"One of us would be puzzled how to get old, Stephen, without t'other getting so too, both being alive," she answered, laughing; "but, any ways, we're such old friends, that 't'hide a word of honest truth fra 'one another would be a sin and a pity. 'Tis better not to walk too much together. 'Times, yes! 'T'would be hard, indeed, if 'twas not to be at all," she said, with a cheerfulness she sought to communicate to him.

"'Tis hard, anyways, Rachael."

"Try to think not; and 'twill seem better."

"I've tried a long time, and 't'a'n't got better. But thou'rt right; 't'might make folk talk, even of thee. Thou hast been that to me, Eachael, through so many year: thou hast done me so much good, and heartened me in that cheering way; that thy word is a law to me. Ah lass, and a bright good law! Better than some real ones."

"Never fret about them, Stephen," she answered quickly, and not without an anxious glance at his face. "Let the laws be."

"Yes," he said, with a slow nod or two. "Let 'em be. Let everything be. Let all sorts alone. 'Tis a muddle, and that's all."

"Always a muddle?" said Rachael, with another gentle touch upon his arm, as if to recall him out of the thoughtfulness, in which he was biting the long ends of his loose neckerchief as he walked along. The touch had its instantaneous effect. He let them fall, turned a smiling face upon her, and said, as he broke into a good-humoured laugh. "Ay, Rachael, lass, awlus a muddle. That's when I stick. I come to the muddle many times and again, and I never get beyond it."

They had walked some distance, and were near their own homes. The woman's was the first reached. It was in one of the many small streets for which the favourite undertaker (who turned a handsome sum out of the one poor ghastly pomp of the neighbourhood) kept a black ladder, in order that those who had done their daily grooping up and down the narrow stairs might slide out of this working world by the windows. She stopped at the corner, and putting her hand in his, wished him good night.

"Good night, dear lass; good night!"

She went, with her neat figure and her sober womanly step, down the dark street, and he stood looking after her until she turned into one of the small houses. There was not a flutter of her coarse shawl, perhaps, but had its interest in this man's eyes; not a tone of her voice but had its echo in his innermost heart.

When she was lost to his view, he pursued his homeward way, glancing up sometimes at the sky, where the clouds were sailing fast and wildly. But, they were broken now, and the rain had ceased, and the moon shone—looking down the high chimneys of Coketown on the deep furnaces below, and casting Titanic shadows of the steam engines at rest, upon the walls where they were lodged. The man seemed to have brightened with the night, as he went on.

His home, in such another street as the first, saving that it was narrower, was over a little shop. How it came to pass that any people found it worth their while to sell or buy the wretched little toys, mixed up in its window with cheap newspapers and pork (there was a leg to be raffled for to-morrow night), matters not here. He took his end of candle from a shelf, lighted it at another end of candle on the counter, without disturbing the mistress of the shop who was asleep in her little room, and went up stairs into his lodging.

It was a room, not unacquainted with the black ladder under various tenants; but as neat, at present, as such a room could be. A few books and writings were on an old bureau in a corner, the furniture was decent and sufficient, and, though the atmosphere was tainted, the room was clean.

Going to the hearth to set the candle down upon a round three-legged table standing there, he stumbled against something. As he recoiled, looking down at it, it raised itself up into the form of a woman in a sitting posture. "Hast thou come back again!"

Such a woman! A disabled, drunken creature, barely able to preserve the sitting posture by steadying herself with one begrimed hand on the floor, while the other was so purposeless in trying to push away her tangled hair from her face, that it only blinded her the more with the dirt upon it. A creature so foul to look at, in her tatters, stains, and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy, that it was a shameful thing even to see her.

After an impatient oath or two, and some stupid clawing of herself with the hand not necessary to her support, she got her hair
away from her eyes sufficiently to obtain a sight of him. Then she sat swaying her body to and fro, and making gestures with her unnerved arm, which seemed intended as the accompaniment to a fit of laughter, though her face was stolid and drowsy.

"Eigh lad? What, yo'r there?" Some hoarse sounds meant for this, came mockingly out of her at last; and her head dropped forward on her breast.

"Back again?" she screeched, after some minutes, as if he had that moment said it. "Yes! And back again. Back agen and ever so often. Back? Yes, back. Why not?"

Roused by the unmeaning violence with which she cried it out, she scrambled up, and stood supporting herself with her shoulders against the wall; dangling in one hand by the string, a dunghill-fragment of a bonnet, and against the wall; her face was stolid and drowsy.

"I'll sell thee off again, and I'll sell thee off again, and I'll sell thee off a score of times!" she cried, with something between a laugh and a sob. "Come awa' from th' bed!" He was sitting on the side of it, with his face hidden in his hands. "Come awa' from 't. Tis mine, and I've a right to 't!"

As she staggered to it, he avoided her with a shudder, and passed—his face still hidden—to the opposite end of the room. She threw herself upon the bed heavily, and soon was snoring hard. He sunk into a chair, and moved but once all that night. It was to throw away from her eyes sufficiently to obtain a sight of him.
HARD TIMES.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

CHAPTER XI.

The Fairy palaces, burst out into illumination, before pale morning, showed the monstrous serpents of smoke trailing themselves over Coketown. A clattering of clogs upon the pavement; a rapid ringing of bells; and all the melancholy-mad elephants, polished and oiled up for the day's monotony, were at their heavy exercise again.

Stephen bent over his loom, quiet, watchful, and steady. A special contrast, as every man was in the forest of looms where Stephen worked, to the crashing, smashing, tearing piece of mechanism, at which he laboured. Never fear, good people of an anxious turn of mind, that Art will consign Nature to oblivion. Set anywhere, side by side, the work of God and the work of man; and the former, even though it be a troop of Hands of very small account, will gain in solemn dignity from the comparison.

Four hundred and more Hands in this Mill; Two hundred and fifty horse Steam Power. It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but, not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent, for the decomposition of virtue into vice, or the reverse, at any single moment in the soul of one of these its quiet servants, with the composed faces and the regulated actions. There is no mystery in it; there is an unfathomable mystery in the meanest of them, for ever.—Supposing we were to reserve our arithmetic for material objects, and to govern these awful unknown quantities by other means!

The day grew strong, and showed itself outside, even against the naming lights within. The lights were turned out, and the work went on. The rain fell, and the Smoke-serpents, submissive to the curse of all that tribe, trailed themselves upon the earth. In the waste-yard outside, the steam from the escape-pipe, the litter of barrels and old iron, the shining heaps of coals, the ashes everywhere, were shrouded in a veil of mist and rain.

The work went on, until the noon-bell rang. More clattering upon the pavements. The looms, and wheels, and Hands, all out of gear for an hour.

Stephen came out of the hot mill into the damp wind and the cold wet streets, haggard and worn. He turned from his own class and his own quarter, taking nothing but a little bread as he walked along, towards the hill on which his principal employer lived, in a red house with black outside shutters, green inside blinds, a black street door, up two white steps, Bounderby (in letters very like himself) upon a brass plate, and a round brazen door-handle underneath it like a brazen full-stop.

Mr. Bounderby was at his lunch. So Stephen had expected. "Would his servant say that one of the Hands begged leave to speak to him? Message in return, requiring name of such Hand. Stephen Blackpool. There was nothing troublesome against Stephen Blackpool; yes, he might come in.

Stephen Blackpool in the parlour. Mr. Bounderby (whom he just knew by sight), at lunch on chop and sherry. Mrs. Sparsit netting at the fireside, in a sidesaddle attitude, with one foot in a cotton stirrup. It was a part, at once of Mrs. Sparsit's dignity and service, so to lunch. She supervised the meal officially, but implied that in her own stately person she could lunch a weakness.

"Now, Stephen," said Mr. Bounderby, "what's the matter with you?"

Stephen made a bow. Not a servile one—these Hands will never do that! Lord bless you, sir, you'll never catch them at that, if they have been with you twenty years!—and, as a complimentary toilet for Mrs. Sparsit, tucked his neckerchief ends into his waistcoat.

"Now, you know," said Mr. Bounderby, taking some sherry, "we have never had any difficulty with you, and you have never been one of the unreasonable ones. You don't expect to be set up in a coach and six, and to be fed on turtle-soup and venison, with a gold spoon, as a good many of 'em do;" Mr. Bounderby always represented this to be the sole, immediate, and direct object of any Hand who was not entirely satisfied; "and therefore I know already that you have not come here to make a complaint. Now, you know, I am certain of that, beforehand."
"No, sir, sure I ha' not coom for nowt o' th' kind."

Mr. Bounderby seemed agreeably surprised, notwithstanding his previous strong conviction. "Very well," he returned. "You're a steady Hand, and I was not mistaken. Now, let me hear what it's all about. As it's not that, let me hear what it is. What have you got to say? Out with it, lad!"

Stephen hastened to glance towards Mrs. Sparsit. "I can go, Mr. Bounderby, if you wish it," said that self-sacrificing lady, making a feint of taking her foot out of the stirrup.

Mr. Bounderby stayed her, by holding a mouthful of chop in suspension before swallowing it, and putting out his left hand. Then, withdrawing his hand and swallowing his mouthful of chop, he said to Stephen:

"Now, now you, this good lady is a born lady, a high lady. You are not to suppose because she keeps my house for me, that she hasn't been very high up the tree — ah, up at the top of the tree! Now, if you have got anything to say that can't be said before a born lady, this lady will leave the room. If what you have got to say, can be said before a born lady, this lady will stay where she is."

"Sir, I hope I never had nowt to say, not fitten for a born lady to hear, sin' I were born mysen'," was the reply, accompanied with a slight flush.

"Very well," said Mr. Bounderby, pushing away his plate, and leaning back. "Fire away!"

"I ha' coom," Stephen began, raising his eyes from the floor, after a moment's consideration, to ask yo your advice. I need't overmuch. I were married on a Easter Monday nine year sin', long and drear. She were a overmuch. I were married on a Easter Monday nine year sin', long and drear. She were a overmuch. I were married on a Easter Monday nine year sin', long and drear.

"I were very patient wi' her. I tried to wean her fra't, ower and ower agen. I tried this, I tried that, I tried t'other. I ha' gone home, many's the time, and found all vanished as I had in the world, and her without a sense left to bless hersen' lying on bare ground. I ha' don't not once, not twice — twenty time!"

Every line in his face deepened as he said it, and put in its affecting evidence of the suffering he had undergone.

"From bad to worse, from worse to worse. She left me. She disgraced hersen' every-ways, bitter and bad. She coom back, she coom back, she coom back. What could..."
ney-piece. "What are you talking about? You took her, for better for worse."

"I mun' be ridden o' her. I cannot bear't more. I ha' lived'under't so long, for that I ha' had'n the pity and the comforting words o' th' best lass living or dead. Haply, but for her, I should ha' gotten hottering mad."

"He wishes to be free, to marry the female of whom he speaks, I fear, sir," observed Mrs. Sparsit in an under-tone, and much dejected by the immorality of the people.

"I do. The lady says what's right. I do. I were a coming to't. I ha' read i' th' papers that great fok (fair faw 'em a'! I wishes 'em no hurt!) are not bonded together for better for worse so fast, but that they can be set free fra' their misfortune, marriages, and marry ower again. When they dunnot agree, for that their tempers is ill-sorted, they have rooms of one kind an' another in their houses, and they can live asunders. We fok ha' only one room, and we can't. When that won't do, they ha' gowd and other cases, and they can say, 'This for yo, and that for me,' and they can go their separate ways. We can't. 'Spite o' all that, they can be set free for smaller wrongs than mine. So, I mun be.

"No no," returned Mr. Bounderby. "If I do her any hurt, sir, there's a law to punish me?"

"Of course there is."

"If I flee from her, there's a law to punish me?"

"Of course there is."

"If I marry 't oother dear lass, there's a law to punish me?"

"Of course there is."

"If I was to live wi' her an' not marry her—saying such a thing could be, which it never could or would, an' her so good—there's a law to punish me, in every innocent chilt belonging to me?"

"Of course there is."

"Now, God's name," said Stephen Blackpool, "show me the law to help me!"

"There's a sanctity in this relation of life," said Mr. Bounderby, "and—and—it must be kept up."

"No no, dunnot say that, sir. 'Tain't kep' up that way. Not that way. 'Tis kep' down that way. I'm a weaver, I were in a fact'ry when a chilt, but I ha' gotten een to see wi' and eern to hear wi'. I read in th' papers, every ' Sizes, every Sessions—and you read too—I know it!—with dismay—how th' unpossibility o' ever getting un-chained from one another, at any price, on any terms, brings blood upon this land, and brings many common married fok (agen I say, women fur o'ener than men) to battle, murder, and sudden death. Let us ha' this, right understood. Mine's a grievous case, an' I want—if yo will be so good—u' know the law that helps me."

"Now, I tell you what!" said Mr. Bounderby, putting his hands in his pockets. "There is such a law."

Stephen, subsiding into his quiet manner, and never wandering in his attention, gave a nod. "But it's not for you at all. It costs money. It costs a mint of money."

How much might that be? Stephen calmly asked.

"Why, you'd have to go to Doctors' Commons with a suit, and you'd have to go to a court of Common Law with a suit, and you'd have to go to the House of Lords with a suit, and you'd have to get an Act of Parliament to enable you to marry again, and it would cost you (if it was a case of very plain-sailing), I suppose from a thousand to fifteen hundred pound," said Mr. Bounderby. "Perhaps twice the money."

"There's no other law?"

"Certainly not."

"Why then, sir," said Stephen, turning white, and motioning with that right hand of his, as if he gave everything to the four winds, "tis a muddle. 'Tis just a muddle a' together, an' the sooner I am dead, the better."

(Mrs. Sparsit again dejected by the impiety of the people.)

"Pooh, pooh! Don't you talk nonsense, my good fellow," said Mr. Bounderby, "about things you don't understand; and don't you call the Institutions of your country a muddle, or you'll get yourself into a real muddle one of these fine mornings. The institutions of your country are not your piece-work, and the only thing you have got to do, is, to mind your piece-work. You didn't take your wife for fast and for loose; but for better for worse. If she has turned out worse—why, all we have got to say is, she might have turned out better."

"'Tis a muddle," said Stephen, shaking his head as he moved to the door. "'Tis a muddle!"

"Now, I'll tell you what!" Mr. Bounderby resumed, as a valedictory address. "With what I shall call your unhallowed opinions, you have been quite shocking this lady: who, as I have already told you is a born lady, and who, as I have not already told you, has had her own marriage misfortunes to the tune of tens of thousands of pounds—tens of Thousand of Pounds!" (he repeated it with great relish.) "Now, you have always been a steady Hand hitherto; but my opinion is, to mind your piece-work. You didn't take your wife for fast and for loose; but for better for worse. If she has turned out worse—why, all we have got to say is, she might have turned out better."

"'Tis a muddle," said Stephen, shaking his head as he moved to the door. "'Tis a muddle!"
good many, perhaps, because I had my nose well kept to it when I was young. I see traces of the turtle soup, and venison, and gold spoon in this. *Yes, I do!* cried Mr. Bounderby, shaking his head with obstinate cunning. "*By the Lord Harry, I do!*"

With a very different shake of the head and a deep sigh, Stephen said, "*Thank you, sir, I wish you good day.*" So he left Mr. Bounderby swelling at his own portrait on the wall, as if he were going to explode himself into it; and Mrs. Sparsit still ambling on with her foot in her stirrup, looking quite cast down by the popular vices.

**CHAPTER XII.**

OLD STEPHEN descended the two white steps, shutting the black door with the brazen doorknocker, by the aid of the brazen full-stop, to which he gave a patting polish with the sleeve of his coat, observing that his hot hand clouded it. He crossed the street with his eyes bent upon the ground, and thus was walking sorrowfully away, when he felt a touch upon his arm.

It was not the touch he needed most at such a moment — the touch that could calm the wild waters of his soul, as the uplifted hand of the sublimest love and patience could abate the raging of the sea — yet it was a woman's hand too. It was an old woman, tall and shapely still, though withered by Time, on whose eyes fell when he stopped and turned. She was very cleanly and plainly dressed, her hands were unused; all bespoke an old woman from the country, in her plain holiday clothes, come into Coketown on an expedition about the streets, and see the gentlemen.

"*Pray sir,*" said the old woman, "*did'nt I see you come out of that gentleman's house?*" pointing back to Mr. Bounderby's. "*I believe it was you, unless I have had the bad luck to mistake the person in following?*"

"*Yes missus,*" returned Stephen, "*it were me.*"

"*Have you—you'll excuse an old woman's curiosity—have you seen the gentleman?*"

"*Yes, missus.*"

"*And how did he look, sir? Was he portly, bold, outspoken, hearty?*" As she straightened her own figure, and held up her head in adapting her action to her words, the idea crossed Stephen that he had seen this old woman before, and had not quite liked her.

"*O yes,*" he returned, observing her more attentively, *"he were all that.*"

"*And healthy,*" said the old woman, "*as the fresh wind?*

"*Yes,*" returned Stephen. "*He were etch and drinking—as large and as loud as a Humblebee."

"*Thank you!*" said the old woman with infinite content. "*Thank you!*"

He certainly never had seen this old woman before. Yet there was a vague remembrance in his mind, as if he had more than once dreamed of some old woman like her.

She walked along at his side, and, gently accommodating himself to her humour, he said Coketown was a busy place, was it not? To which she answered, "*Eigh sure! Dreadful busy!*" Then he said, she came from the country, he saw? To which she answered in the affirmative.

"*By Parliamentary, this morning. I came forty mile by Parliamentary this morning, and I'm going back the same forty mile this afternoon. I walked nine mile to the station this morning, and if I find nobody on the road to give me a lift, I shall walk the nine mile back to night. That's pretty well, sir, at my age!*" said the chatty old woman, her eyes brightening with exultation.

"*Deed 'tis. Don't do too often, missus.*"

"*No, no. Once a year,*" she answered, shaking her head. "*I spend my savings so, once every year. I come, regular, to tramp about the streets, and see the gentlemen.*

"*Only to see 'em?*" returned Stephen.

"*That's enough for me,*" she replied, with great earnestness and interest of manner.

"*I ask no more! I have been standing about, on this side of the way, to see that gentleman,*" turning her head back towards Mr. Bounderby's again, "*come out. But, he's late this year, and I have not seen him. You came out, instead. Now, if I am obliged to go back without a glimpse of him—I only want a glimpse—well! I have seen you, and you have seen him, and I must make that do.*" Saying this, she looked at Stephen as if to fix his features in her mind, and her eyes were not so bright as they had been.

With a large allowance for difference of tastes, and with all submission to the patriarchs of Coketown, this seemed so extraordinary a source of interest to take so much trouble about, that it perplexed him. But they were passing the church now, and as his eye caught the clock, he quickened his pace.

He was going to his work? the old woman said, quickening hers, too, quite easily. Yes, time was nearly out. On his telling her where he worked, the old woman became a more singular old woman than before.
"An't you happy?" she asked him.

"Why—there's—awmost nobody but has their troubles, missus." He answered evasively, because the old woman appeared to take it for granted that he would be very happy indeed, and he had not the heart to disappoint her. He knew that there was trouble enough in the world; and if the old woman had lived so long, and scarcely counted upon his having so little, why so much the better for her, and none the worse for him.

"Ay, ay! You have your troubles at home, you mean?" she said.

"Times. Just now and then," he answered slightly.

"But, working under such a gentleman, they don't follow you to the Factory?"

No, no; they didn't follow him there, said Stephen. All correct there. Everything accordant there. (He did not go so far as to say, for her pleasure, that there was a sort of Divine Right there; but, I have heard claims almost as magnificent of late years.)

They were now in the black bye-road near the place, and the Hands were crowding in. The bell was ringing, and the Serpent was a Serpent of many coils, and the Elephant was getting ready. The strange old woman was delighted with the very bell. It was the beautifullest bell she had ever heard, she said, and sounded grand! She asked him, when he stopped good-naturedly to shake hands with her before going in, how long he had worked there?

"A dozen year," he told her.

"I must kiss the hand," said she, "that has worked in this fine factory for a dozen year!" And she lifted it, though he would have prevented her, and put it to her lips. What harmony, besides her age and her simplicity, surrounded her, he did not know, but even in this fantastic action there was a something neither out of time nor place: a something which it seemed as if nobody else could have made as serious, or done with such a natural and touching air.

He had been at his loom full half an hour, thinking about this old woman, when, having occasion to move round the loom for its adjustment, he glanced through a window which was in his corner, and saw her still looking up at the pile of building, lost in admiration. Headless of the smoke and mud and wet, and of her two long journeys, she was gazing at it, as if the heavy thrum that issued from its many stories were proud music to her.

She was gone by and by, and the day went after her, and the lights sprung up again, and the Express whirled in full sight of the Fairy Palace over the arches near: little felt amid the jarring of the machinery, and scarcely heard above its crash and rattle. Long before then, his thoughts had gone back to the dreary room above the little shop, and to the shameful figure heavy on the bed, but heavier on his heart.

Machinery slackened; throbbing feebly like a fainting pulse; stopped. The bell again; the glare of light and heat dispelled; the factories, looming heavy in the black wet night; their tall chimneys rising up into the air like competing Towers of Babel.

He had spoken to Rachael only last night, it was true, and had walked with her a little way; but he had his new misfortune on him, in which no one else could give him a moment's relief, and, for the sake of it, and because he knew himself to want that softening of his anger which no voice but hers could effect, he felt he might so far disregard what she had said as to wait for her again. He waited, but she had eluded him. She was gone. On no other night in the year, could be so ill have spared her patient face.

O! Better to have no home in which to lay his head, than to have a home and dread to go to it, through such a cause. He ate and drank, for he was exhausted—but, he little knew or cared what; and he wandered about in the chill rain, thinking and thinking, and brooding and brooding.

No word of a new marriage had ever passed between them; but Rachael had taken great pity on him years ago, and to her alone he had opened his closed heart all this time, on the subject of his miseries; and he knew very well that if he were free to ask her, she would take him. He thought of the home he might at that moment have been seeking with pleasure and pride; of the different man he might have been that night; of the lightness then in his now heavy-laden breast; of the then restored honor, self-respect, and tranquillity, now all torn to pieces. He thought of the waste of the best part of his life, of the change it made in his character for the worse every way, of the dreadful nature of his existence, bound hand and foot to a dead woman, and tormented by a demon in her shape. He thought of Rachael, how young when they were first brought together in those circumstances, how mature now, how soon to grow old. He thought of the number of girls and women she had seen marry, how many homes with children in them she had seen grow up around her, how she had contentedly pursued her own lone quiet path—for him—and how he had sometimes seen a shade of melancholy on her blessed face, that smote him with remorse and despair. He set the picture of her up, beside the infamous image of last night; and thought, Could it be, that the whole earthly course of one so gentle, good, and self-denying, was subjugate to such a wretch as that!

Filled with these thoughts—so filled that he had an unwholesome sense of growing larger, of being placed in some new and diseased relation towards the objects among
which he passed, of seeing the iris round every misty light turn red—he went home for shelter.

TROOPS AND JOBS IN MALTA.

At anchor in the harbour of Valetta! Awake in my berth, missing the usual lullaby, the roaring of the waves, and thumping of the engine, I heard the rain as it came pattering down on the deck. There was clear sky in the morning and a brilliant sun. The harbour was astir: Coldstream and Grenadier Guards crowded the windows of the houses, and the veranda of the Lazaretto, the decks of the troop-ships recently arrived, were red, black, and white with soldiers, in every state of dress and undress; gay boats were at work, dancing about upon the surf between the shore and ships, carrying to land soldiers, who stepped out in full parade dress, boat-load after boat-load, from among the motley crowds of their companions. There was much cheering and laughter floating fitfully about. I meant to make myself at home in Malta for at least a fortnight, and was very much disposed to do so. It was then Sunday morning in March, and I said to myself, I will put on my boots and go ashore to breakfast.

Let the geographer describe Valetta; to do that is not my task. I went up the Strada St. Lucia to look for the Imperial Hotel—a caravanserai beloved by midshipmen, and therefore methought a very good place for a gentleman unattached. Thither, accordingly, I went, and there had breakfast in the coffee-room, with half-a-dozen guardsmen and seamen. All were possessed by a most eager curiosity for news; and, as our vessel brought none of importance, there was great disappointment. Nobody knew when the Russians were to be attacked. That being settled, all joined in a general assault upon the trenchers of eggs, fowls, ham, and legs of mutton, served in London style, at London prices. The Imperial Hotel might, for anything that I saw foreign about it, be the Cock in Fleet Street.

I made haste out, therefore, into the streets, and soon saw that it was not England when I got into the bustle of the Strada Reale. The whole pavement, and portions of the road as well, were occupied with people; the inhabitants of Valetta and of the surrounding villages were there in Sunday dress, going to mass, coming from mass, or killing the time between one mass and another; walking about, standing about, leaning against walls or closed shop shutters, very many of them busily engaged—women especially—in looking at and talking about, the blue-coated, red-coated, and gold-laced strangers. Broad-brimmed priests walked to and fro like kings, parting the crowds before them as they went, and as insignificant at the tokens which surrounded them of a crusade in favour of the infidels, as the old knights of Malta would themselves have been, if they could have broken through the mosaic floors of the churches in which they lie, and have come out to see what was aloft under the sun. The female population of the town and neighbourhood had turned out, to a woman, for a good Sunday inspection of the newly-arrived troops. Maltese ladies of rank generally dress in ordinary European style, only with more decided preference for white and sombre colours. Natives belonging to the middle and the lower classes commonly adhere to the old island costume, wearing black dresses, white collars, and large black shawls, gathered into a great many folds at one side, and drawn so far over the head, as to throw the face into shadow. The old women are quite interesting for their ugliness, the young ones for their beauty, and for exposing the English forces to considerable peril; many of our soldiers will, I fear, leave Malta vanquished men.

I have fairly fulfilled my design of spending fourteen days in Malta, and at the end of them I now set down my notes of Maltese experience, and of the talk that I have heard commonly among the people. I may repeat much that is incorrect, for I am no more than a reporter of opinions and tales that I found current in the place. But, as they are opinions and tales that I found universally accredited, I think it proper to make them known.

Though the Maltese air seemed to me coming as I did from the smoke of London—genial and bracing, the weather sunny and most delightful, the Maltese themselves were grumbling about cold. The winter had been severe, and the spring they said was late; then again, prices were so high that they thought a famine was impending. I need give no details about the climate, for I am not describing Malta. I do not find the nights extremely cold and damp, and, granting it to be true as everybody said, that there was no necessity for such exposure, I did think it a wrong thing that any of our soldiers should be sleeping under canvas. They will have plenty of unavoidable hardships to endure, time enough hereafter for "roughing it." Why not let them be well lodged, if good lodging exist? The fears of famine are now over. An advance in the prices soon allured to Malta, fowls and vegetables from Sicily, and beef from Tunis. Some fragments of the beef from Tunis are, I believe, to this hour clinging between my teeth. It was good wholesome beef, and there was plenty of it, but its prime joints had the texture of the toughest gristle. The soldiers in Malta must take what provisions they can get; but as to lodging accommodation, people want to know why the demand does not produce a sufficient supply. The material, it is said, exists. On a former occasion, when a concentration of troops took place at Malta, house-room was