GREAT EXPECTATIONS.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

CHAPTER V.

The apparition of a file of soldiers ringing down the butt-ends of their loaded muskets on our door-step, caused the dinner-party to rise from table in confusion, and caused Mrs. Joe re-entering the kitchen empty-handed, to stop short and stare, in her wondering lament of "Gracious goodness gracious me, what's gone—with the—pie!"

The sergeant and I were in the kitchen when Mrs. Joe stood staring up at him; he had spoken to me, and he was now looking round at the company, with his hands invitingly extended towards them in his right hand, and his left on my shoulder.

"Excuse us, ladies and gentlemen," said the sergeant, "but as I have mentioned at the door to this smart young shaver!" (which he hadn't), "I am on a chase in the name of the King, and I want the blacksmith."

"And pray what might you want with him?" retorted my sister, quick to resent his being wanted at all.

"Missis," returned the gallant sergeant, "speaking for myself, I should reply, the honour and pleasure of his fine wife's acquaintance; speaking for the King, I answer, a little job done."

This was received as rather neat in the sergeant; insomuch that Mr. Pumblechook cried out, "Good again!"

"You see, blacksmith," said the sergeant, who had by this time picked out Joe with his eye, "we have had an accident with these, and I find the lock of one of 'em goes wrong, and the coupling don't act. As they are wanted for immediate service, will you throw your eye over them?"

Joe threw his eye over them, and pronounced that the job would necessitate the lighting of his forge fire, and would take nearer two hours than one. "Will it? Then will you set about it at once, blacksmith," said the off-hand sergeant, "as it's on his Majesty's service. And if my men can hear a hand anywhere, they'll make themselves useful." With that, he called to his men, who came trooping into the kitchen one after another, and piled their arms in a corner. And then they stood about, as soldiers do; now, with their hands loosely clasped before them; now, resting a knee or a shoulder; now, easing a belt or a pouch; now, opening the door to spit stiffly over their high stocks, out into the yard.

All these things I saw without them knowing that I saw them, for I was in an agony of tension. But, beginning to perceive that the handcuffs were not for me, and that the military had so far got the better of the pie as to put it in the background, I collected a little more of my scattered wits.

"Would you give me the Time?" said the sergeant, addressing himself to Mr. Pumblechook, as to a man whose appreciative powers justified the inference that he was equal to the time.

"It's just gone half-past two." "That's not so bad," said the sergeant, reflecting; "even if I was forced to halt here night two hours, that'll do. How far might you call yourselves from the marshes, hereabouts? Not above a mile, I reckon?"

"Just a mile," said Mrs. Joe.

"That'll do. We begin to close in upon 'em about dusk. A little before dusk, my orders are, That'll do." "Convicts, sergeant?" asked Mr. Wopsle, in a matter-of-course way.

"Ay!" returned the sergeant, "two. They're pretty well known to be out on the marshes still, and they won't try to get clear of 'em before dusk. Anybody here seen anything of any such game?"

Everybody, myself excepted, said no, with confidence. Nobody thought of me.

"Well!" said the sergeant, "they'll find themselves trapped in a circle, I expect, sooner than they count on. Now, blacksmith! If you're ready, His Majesty the King is." Joe had got his coat and waistcoat and cravat off, and his leather apron on, and passed into the forge. One of the soldiers opened its wooden windows, another lighted the fire, another turned to at the bellows, the real stood round the blaze, which was soon roaring. Then Joe began to hammer and clinch, hammer and clinch, and we all looked on.

The interest of the impending pursuit not only subdued the general excitement, but even made my sister liberal. She drew a pilder of beer from the cask, for the soldiers, and invited the sergeant to take a glass of brandy. But Mr. Pumblechook said, sharply, "Give him
wine, mum. I'll engage there's no Tar in that:"

so, the sergeant landed him, and said that as he preferred his drink without tar, he would take wine, if it was equally convenient. When it was given him, he drank his Majesty's health and Compliments of the Season, and took it all as a mouthful and smacked his lips.

"Good stuff, eh, sergeant?" said Mr. Pumblechook.

"I'll tell you something," returned the sergeant; "I suspect that stuff's of your providing." Mr. Pumblechook, with a fat sort of laugh, said, "Ay, ay? Why?"

"Because," returned the sergeant, clapping him on the shoulder, "I suspect that stuff's of your providing.

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As I watched them while they all stood clustered about the forge enjoying themselves, so much, I thought what terrible good sauce for a dinner my fugitive friend on the marshes was. They had not enjoyed themselves in quarter so much, before the excitement he furnished. And now, when they were all in lively expectation of doing something at their command, and I thought to roast for the fugitives, the fire to flare for them, the smoke to hurry away in pursuit of them, Joe to hammer and clink for them, and all the noisy shadows on the wall to whistle at them in menace as the blaze rose and sank and the red hot sparks dropped and died, the pale afternoon outside, almost seemed in my pitying young fancy to have turned pale on their account, poor wretches.

At last, Joe's job was done, and the ringing and roasting stopped. As Joe got on his coat, he mustered courage to propose that some of us should go down with the soldiers and see what came of the hunt. Mr. Pumblechook and Mr. Hubble declined, on the plea of a pipe and ladies' society; but Mr. Wopsle said he would go, if Joe would. Joe said he was agreeable, and he would take me, if Mrs. Joe approved. We never should have gone to leave, I am sure, but for Mrs. Joe's curiosity to know all about it and how it ended. As it was, she merely stipulated, "If you bring the boy back with his head blown to bits by a musket, don't look to me to put it in order again."

The sergeant took a polite leave of the ladies, and parted from Mr. Pumblechook as from a comrade; though I doubt if he were quite as fully sensible of that gentleman's merits under said conditions, as when something most was going. His men resumed their muskets and fell in. Mr. Wopsle, Joe, and I, received strict charge to keep in the rear, and to speak no word after we reached the marshes. When we were all out in the raw air and were steadily moving towards our business, I treasonably whispered to Joe, "I hope, Joe, we shan't find them." And Joe whispered to me, "I'd give a shilling if they had cut and run, Pip."

We were joined by no stragglers from the village, for the weather was cold and threatening, the way dreary, the footing bad, darkness coming on, and the people had good fires in-doors and were keeping the day. A few faces hurried to glowing windows and looked after us, but none came out. We passed the finger-post, and held straight on to the chaser. There, we were stopped a few minutes by a signal from the sergeant's hand, while two or three of his men dispersed themselves among the graves, and also examined the porch. They came in again with out finding anything, and then we struck out on the open marshes, through the gate at the side of the churchyard. A bitter sleet came rattling against us here on the east wind, and Joe took me on his back.

Now that we were out upon the dismal wilderness where they little thought I had been within eight or nine hours and had seen both men hiding, I considered for the first time, with great dread, if we should come upon them, would my particular convict suppose that it was I who had brought the soldiers there? He had asked me if I would bring a strong man, and he had said I should be a fierce young fellow if I joined the hunt against him. Would he believe that I was both imp and bound in treacherous earnest, and had plotted it all, and told me to do it?

It was of no use asking myself this question now. There I was, on Joe's back, and there was Joe before me, charging at the witches like a hunter, and stimulating Mr. Wopsle not to tarry on his Roman nose, and to keep up with us. The soldiers were in front of us, extended into a pretty wide line with an interval between man and man. We were taking the course I had begun with, and from which I had diverged in the mist. Since the mist was not cut out again yet, or the wind had dispelled it. Under the low red glare of sunset, the beacon, and the gibbet, and the mound of the Battery, and the opposite shore of the river, were plain, though all of a watery lead colour.

With my heart thumping like a blacksmith at Joe's broad shoulder, I looked all about for any sign of the convicts. I could see none; I could hear none. Mr. Wopsle had greatly alarmed me more than once, by his blowing and hard breathing; but I knew the sounds by this time, and could distinguish them from the object
of pursuit. I got a dreadful start, when I thought I heard the bell still going; but it was only a sheep bell. The sheep stopped in their eating and looked timidly at us; and the cattle, their heads turned from the wind and sleet, stared angrily as if they held us responsible for both annoyances; but, except these things, and the shudder of the dying day in every blade of grass, there was no break in the bleak stillness of the marshes.

The soldiers were moving on in the direction of the old Battery, and we were moving on a little way behind them, when, all of a sudden, we all stopped. For, there had reached us on the wings of the wind and rain, a long shout. It was repeated. It was at a distance towards the east, but it was long and loud. Nay, there seemed to be two or more shouts raised together—if one might judge from a confusion in the sound.

To this effect the sergeant and the nearest men were speaking under their breath, when Joe and I came up. After another moment's listening, Joe (who was a good judge) agreed, and Mr. Wopsle (who was a bad judge) agreed. The sergeant, a decisive man, ordered that "the course should not be answered, but that the course should be changed, and that his men should make towards it at the double." So we slanted to the right (where the East was), and Joe pounced away so wonderfully, that I had to hold on tight to keep my seat.

It was a run indeed now, and what Joe called, in the only two words he spoke all the time, "a Winder." Down banks and up banks, and over gates, and splashing into ditches, and breaking among coarse rushes: no man cared where he went. As we came nearer to the shouting, it became more and more apparent that it was made by more than one voice. Sometimes, it seemed to stop altogether, and then the soldiers stopped. When it broke out again, the soldiers made for it at a greater rate than ever, and we after them. After a while, we had so run it down, that we could hear one voice calling the other, and without voice, "Convicts! Runaways! Guard! This way for the runaway convicts!" Then both voices would seem to be stillled in a struggle, and then would break out again, and when we had come to this, the soldiers ran like deer, and Joe too.

The sergeant ran in first, when we had run the noise quite down, and two of his men ran in close upon him. Their pieces were cocked and levelled when we all ran in.

"Here are both men!" panted the sergeant, struggling at the bottom of a ditch. "Surrender, you two! and confound you for two wild beasts! Come surrender!"

Water was splashing, and mud was flying, and cobs were being sworn, and blows were being struck, when some men went down into the ditch to help the sergeant, and dragged out, separately, my convict and the other one. Both were bleeding and putting up excoriating and struggling; but of course I knew them both directly.

"Mind!" said my convict, wiping blood from his face with his ragged sleeves, and shaking torn hair from his fingers. "I took him! I give him up to you! Mind that!"

"It's not much to be particular about," said the sergeant; "it'll do you small good, my man, being in the same plight yourself. Handcuffs there!"

"I don't expect it to do me any good. I don't want it to do me more good than it does now," said my convict, with a greedy laugh. "I took him. He knows it. That's enough for men!"

The other convict was liuid to look at, and, in addition to the old bruised left side of his face, seemed to be bruised and torn all over. He could not so much as get his breath to speak, until they were both separately handcuffed, but leaned upon a soldier to keep himself from falling.

"Take notice, guard—he tried to murder me," were his first words.

"Tried to murder him?" said my convict, disdainfully. "Try, and not do it! I took him, and give him up; that's what I done. I not only prevented him getting off the marshes, but I dragged him here—dragged him far on his way back. He's a gentleman, if you please, this villain. Now, the Hulks has got its gentleman again, through me. Murder him? Worth my while, too, to murder him, when I could do worse and drag him back?"

The other one still gasped, "He tried—he tried—to murder me. Hear—bear witness."

"Lookee here!" said my convict to the sergeant. "Single-handed I got clear of the prison-ship; I made a dash and I done it. I could ha' got clear of these death-cold flats like a hare from a hound—if I hadn't made discovery that he was here. Let him go free? Let him profit by the means I found out? Let him make a cock of me again? Once more? No, no, no. If I had died at the bottom there, and he had an emphatic swag at the ditch with his manacled hands; I'd have been born to that grip, that you should have been safe to find him in my hold."

The other fugitive, who was evidently in extreme horror of his companion, repeated, "He tried to murder me. I should have been a dead man if you had not come up.

"He lies!" said my convict, with fierce energy. "He's a liar born, and he'll die a liar. Look at his face; ain't it written there? Let him turn those eyes of his on me. I defy him to do it."

The other, with an effort at a scornful smile—which could not, however, collect the nervous working of his mouth into any set expression—looked at the soldiers, and looked about at the marshes and at the sky, but certainly did not look at the speaker.

"Do you see him?" pursed my convict.

"Do you see what a villain he is? Do you see those grovelling and wandering eyes? That's how he looked when we were tried together. He never looked at me."

The other, always working and working his dry lips and turning his eyes restlessly about him far and near, did at last turn them for a
moment on the speaker, with the words, "You are just look at, and with a half-turning glance at the round hands. At that point, my convict became so frantically exasperated, that he would have rushed upon him but for the interposition of the soldiers. "Didn't I tell you," said the convict then, "that he would murder me, if he could?" Any one could see that he shook with fear, and that there broke out upon his lips, curious white flakes, like this snow:

"Watch this parley," said the sergeant.

"Light those torches."

As one of the soldiers, who carried a basket in lieu of a gun, went down on his knee to open it, we caught round him for the first time, and saw me. I had alighted from Joe's back on the brink of the ditch when we came up, and had not moved since. I looked at him eagerly when he looked at me, and slightly moved my hands and shook my head. I had been waiting for him to see me, that I might try to assure him of my innocence. It was not at all expressed to me that he even comprehended my intention, for he gave me a look that I did not understand, and it all passed in a moment. But if he had looked at me for an hour or a day, I could not have remembered his face ever after-

The soldier with the basket soon got a light, and lighted three or four torches, and took one himself and distributed the others. It had been almost dark before, but now it seemed quite dark, and soon afterwards very dark. Before we departed from that spot, four soldiers standing in a ring, fixed twice into the air. Presently we came to a darkened region, darkened by the willow coppice behind us, and on the marshes on the opposite bank of the river. "All right," said the sergeant. "March."

We had not gone far when three cannon were fired ahead of us with a sound that seemed to burst something inside my ear. "You are expected on board," said the sergeant to my convict, "and are coming. Don't struggle, my man. Close up here."

The two were kept apart, and each walked surrounded by a separate guard. I had held of Joe's haunts now, and Joe carried one of the torches. Mr. Wopsle had been for going back, but Joe was resolved to see it out, so we went on with the party. There was a reasonably good path now, mostly on the edge of the river, with a divergence here and there where a dyke came, with a miniature windmill on it and a muddy sluices-gate. When I looked round, I could see the other lights coming in after us. The torches we carried dropped great blotches of light upon the track, and I could see those, too, lying smoking and flaring. I could see nothing else but black darkness. Our lights warned the air about us with their pitchy blare, and the two prisoners seemed rather to like that, as they limped along in the midst of the darkness. We could not go fast, because of their lameness, and they were so spent, that two or three times we had to halt while they rested.

After an hour or so of this travelling, we came to a rough wooden hut and a landing-place. There was a guard in the hut, and they challenged, and the sergeant answered. Then, we went into the hut where there was a smell of tobacco and whitewash, and a bright fire, and a lamp, and a stand of muskets, and a drum, and a low wooden bedstead, like an overgrown mangle without the machinery, capable of holding about a dozen soldiers all at once. Three or four soldiers who lay upon it in their great-coats, were not much interested in us, but just lifted their heads and took a sleepy stare, and then lay down again. The sergeant made some kind of report, and some entry in a book, and then the man whom I call the other convict was drafted off with his guard, to go on board first.

My convict never looked at me, except that once. While we stood in the hut, he stood before the fire looking thoughtfully at it, or putting up his feet by turns upon the hob, and looking thoughtfully at them as if he piloted them for their recent adventures. Suddenly, he turned to the sergeant, and remarked:

"I wish to say something respecting this escape. It may prevent some persons laying under suspicion amongst me."

"You can say what you like," returned the sergeant, stammering coolly looking at him with his arms folded, "but you have no call to say it here. You'll have opportunity enough to say about it, and hear about it, before it's done with, you know."

"I know, but this is another point, a separate matter. A man can't starve; at least I can't. I took some wood, interested in us, but, I've seen enough things in the village yonder—where the church stands a steeple out on the marshes."

"You mean stolen," said the sergeant. "I'll tell you where from. From the blacksmith's."

"Halloa," said the sergeant, staring at Joe.

"Halloa, Pip!" said Joe, staring at me.

A clump of willows—that's what it was—and a drum of looper, and a pipe.

"Have you happened to miss such an article as a pipe, blacksmith?" asked the sergeant, confidentially.

"My wife did, at the very moment when you came in. Don't you know, Pip?"

"So," said my convict, turning his eyes on Joe in a moody manner, and without the least glance at me; "so you're the blacksmith, are you? Then I'm sorry, I've cut your pipe."

"God knows you've welcome to it—so far as it was ever mine," returned Joe, with a saving remembrance of Mrs. Joe. "We don't know what you have done, but we wouldn't have you starved to death for it, poor miserable fellow-creator. Would us, Pip?"

The something that I had noticed before, clicked in the man's throat again, and he turned his back. The boat had returned, and his guard were ready, so we followed him to the landing-place made of rough stakes and stones, and saw him put into the boat, which was rowed
by a crew of convicts like himself. No one seemed surprised to see him, or interested in seeing him, or glad to see him, or sorry to see him, or spoke a word, except that somebody in the boat growled as if to dogs, "Give way, you!" which was the signal for the dip of the oars. By the light of the torches, we saw the black Hulk lying out a little way from the mud of the shore, like a wrinkled Noah's ark. Cribbed and barred and moored by massive rusty chains, the prison-ship seemed in my young eyes to be ironed like the prisoners. We saw the boat go alongside, and we saw him taken up the side and disappear.

Then, the ends of the torches were flung hissing into the water, and went out, as if it were all over with him.

### THE MAN FOR CHINA.

I HAVE a mission. I may not, perhaps, be able to fulfil it, for we lie at the mercy of circumstances in this trying world. Nevertheless, I am confident that I have a mission, and that mission has reference to China. I have been conscious of the fact for some years past, but it has been impressed upon me more forcibly than ever by the intelligence which we have lately re-ceiving from that country.

I suppose all Englishmen will be ready to confess that our relations with the Chinese empire have not been altogether satisfactory. Without doubt there has been a decided hitch in those relations. They have not been working well for some time past, and, indeed, I may say that they never have worked well at any time. We don't seem, as two nations, to understand each other. We appear to be playing at cross questions and crooked answers, and this state of things is giving rise to all sorts of evils, which are falling in a very disagreeable way upon the temper of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. My mission is to remedy these evils. I feel a kind of inspiration, that I, and I only, am the man to deal with that silly people.

We are in the habit of speaking of such and such a person as being a man suited to his time, a man fitted for the occasion. Wellington was the man for Waterloo, Russell was the man for Reform, Cobden was the man for the Corn Law. Very good, my name is Chapman, and I am the man for China.

Of course such a work as that which I propose to do could not possibly be performed without adequate means and powers being placed at my disposal. Byun Wellington, I presume, mighty genius as he was, would not have been successful at Waterloo altogether by himself. Some people go so far as to say that he was very much indebted to Blucher on that occasion. At any rate he required a British army at his back; and, without a British army, I think, we may safely conclude that his success would have been, to say the least of it, problematical. You will, therefore, not be surprised to hear that I also require certain small aids and auxiliaries. You ask what these are? I have no objection to confess ingenuously that I shall require the assistance, not only of the British army, but, of the British fleet besides. This modest requisition you will probably deny me; nevertheless, I will proceed to lay before you, briefly but clearly, the grounds upon which I, Chapman, thus ask for the confidence and support of the British nation.

First of all, I will begin by saying that, although I understand English and French perfectly, and am decidedly fluent as regards the latter language, yet I know nothing whatever about Chinese. I consider this last a great qualification. You will say it is not a singular one. Probably not. But what is the use of a qualification if it is not taken advantage of? I contend that all our dealings with the Chinese people have been carried on by persons who, if they did not understand the language themselves, were unfortunate enough to be surrounded by those who did, and I further contend that this knowledge has been the cause of all the evils which we have now to deplore. The use of the language, we have been told, is to conceal our thoughts, and this is certainly the use to which the Chinese put it. Talk of their Firework Land! what is the floweriness of their land when compared to the efflorescence of their language? Here are a people who make it their chief business to tell lies. They are great in fire-works, moral as well as pyrotechnic, and the man of genius, with them, is the man who can invent the most awful "crackers." Truthfulness is the sign of a rude, unpolished mind, and a man who should go amongst the Chinese, without first disabusing and concealing and carefully covering over every real feeling of his mind, would be looked upon pretty much in the same light as one of our own unpolished ancestors would be looked upon, if he were to reappear suddenly amongst us, greased and painted. Oh you wonder that Chinamen persist in calling us barbarians, when, notwithstanding all the experience which we have had of their character, we still continue to send diplomats to them, to be caught and wheedled and hum-bled in every possible way? Look at that affair at Tien-tsin the other day. I believe that we were within an ace, on that occasion, of making another of those famous treaties which convulse the fat sides of every mandarin in the empire with mirth. How I wish that I had commenced my mission at that time; that I could have been set down in Lord Elgin's place, and could have had Kewlowsing brought before me. You ask me what I would have done with him? What? Why, I would have had his head cut off; and, if I had made any use whatever of Messrs. Parkes and Wade, it would have been to send them to Hang-fu with my compliments, and to tell him that if any other lying commis-sioners of the same sort were to come before me, I would serve him after the same sort. I think