The Mystery of Edwin Drood

Charles Dickens and Leon Garfield

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About the Book

The Mystery of Edwin Drood *was to be Charles Dickens' last novel, and with his death in 1869, the book has remained a tantalisingly unfinished mystery. Here Leon Garfield relieves the torment of readers by giving them a satisfying and gripping ending, written with a full understanding of Dickens' vivid imagination and style.*

Sedate and Clerical

THE MYSTERY OF
Edwin Drood

CHARLES DICKENS

concluded by

LEON GARFIELD

Illustrated by Antony Maitland

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
EDWARD BLISHEN

RHCP DIGITAL

An Introduction by Edward Blishen

I

When Dickens died on June 9, 1870 — of an explosion of infirmities that would long before have killed a man of less remarkable spirit — he had completed six of the twelve monthly parts of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. He left behind, therefore, a half-novel: a matter apparently of murder, and so apparently of a murderer. But he failed to leave any statement of his intentions for the second half of the story. Strong hints had been given to this person or that (chiefly his friend and biographer, John Forster, and his illustrator, Luke Fildes): but there were no notes to be found, no forward plans. (He had offered Queen Victoria rather more than hints, to be imparted at the slightest show of impatient royal interest: but she was obviously, and exasperatingly, content to wait for the monthly parts as they came out). As a consequence, this great stump of a novel, Dickens' fifteenth, has been for more than a century the subject of fascinated and sometimes irritable discussion. There have been several hundred studies of the puzzle, from works expressing utter confidence ('The Great Mystery Solved', by Gillian Vase, 1878) to works expressing utter despair ('The Drood Mystery Insoluble', by Sir J. C. Squire, 1919). There have also been a fair number of attempts to supply the missing half of the story.

The problem lies partly in the fact that, as most agree, the mystery is less than totally mysterious. That's to say, the element of the whodunnit is very small, if it exists at all. Every clue points to the murderer of Edwin Drood. If it is not

Jasper, the respectable Choir-Master who is also the disreputable opium addict (and surely one of the most improbable youngsters in fiction — it is always astonishing to remind oneself that he is only six-and-twenty), then we must say that Dickens was in a fix: and that to get out of that fix in the remaining half dozen instalments would have required startling narrative acrobatics.

One of the few who have found Jasper innocent was the actor, Felix Aylmer, an indefatigable inquirer into the corners of Dickens' life and work, who proposed (in *The Drood Case*, 1964) that Jasper was truly Edwin Drood's friend and champion, but that a mysterious Egyptian appeared on the scene who, having threatened the lives of both men, then actually made an attempt on them: and that this was misunderstood by Edwin, who thought himself under attack from Jasper, and so disappeared. Behind the whole farrago (though to be fair, it's a keenly argued farrago) lay an old feud, and the code that governs such feuds in Islamic families.

Felix Aylmer was clearly moved by the feeling expressed by one student of the story (William Bleifuss, 'The Re-examination of Edwin Drood', 1954) that if the climax showed that the murder had been carried out exactly as Dickens had hinted, then it would have become an anti-climax. Perhaps: if *Edwin Drood* was the usual novel about murder. But, as Una Pope-Hennessy has said: 'If this were an ordinary murder story we should think the number of clues offered absurd. There is almost nothing for us to find out.'

The other area in which a very small minority have supposed that all is not as it seems to be, in Dickens' apparently very careful disposition of clues, is the actual, essential matter of there being, or not being, any murder at all. Again there has been anxiety, in some quarters, to extract the fullest possible value from the title. 'If Edwin Drood is dead,' as G. K. Chesterton observed, 'there is not much mystery about him.' So perhaps he isn't dead, after

all. It happened, come to that, in the novel before this one: John Harmon, in *Our Mutual Friend*, is confidently believed to be dead, but turns out to be very much alive. Philip Hobsbaum, who has perhaps read more of what he calls Droodiana than anyone else, says the view that Edwin Drood is alive after all is found most often in adaptations and completions of the story for stage or screen. It provides an obvious *coup de théâtre*.

Some have attempted to satisfy at a blow two of the questions left unanswered by Dickens, with the supposal that the mysterious Datchery (about whom Dickens seems either to be indicating that he is disguised or strongly suggesting that he is not) is really Edwin Drood. In one solution Drood is not only alive but, in the end, is married to Rosa. The absence of seriousness towards her, on his part, and absence of a suitable degree of love towards him, on hers, have been tested by the whole appalling affair, and they have become aware of their true feeling for each other. But the fact is that Dickens could have contrived such a climax only by making emotional nonsense of the passages in which, in his tenderest and most irreversible fashion, he has made obvious the love of Tartar for Rosa, and hers for him.

As we have seen, most of the Droodists (again, this word is a useful invention of Philip Hobsbaum's) agree that Jasper is the murderer. They are left with the question of his motive. Some are straightforward about this: he loved Rosa, and that was enough. (Imagine a novel by Dickens as simple as this!) There are the sentimentalists, as I think they must be called, who believe the motive was a desire to save Rosa from a miserable match (which might be, but oh so feebly, an alternative explanation to the obvious one of Jasper's horror on learning that the engagement had been broken off). It has been supposed, at a low level of supposition, that Jasper was after the Drood fortune. In a peculiarly complex suggestion, he is not Jasper at all, but his own half-brother,

who is altogether a half-creature, being a Eurasian: he was taken Jasper's place, a substitution made possible because . . . Mind and imagination boggle together. Perhaps the limpest suggestion as to motive was the most horribly obvious: that Jasper committed the murder whilst temporarily insane, as a result of drug-taking.

The most cogent, perhaps, of all these views of Jasper sees him as a Thug — a member of the Indian religious organisation of murderers and robbers that had been put down more than a quarter of a century before *Edwin Drood* was written. Dickens had serialised an account of this sect in his magazine, *All the Year Round*: where he had also serialised his friend Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* – largely a matter of Indians, drugs and violence, with religious roots. Dickens had made it clear that he thought he could improve on his friend's narrative method, given similar materials. Murder as carried out by a Thug involved the use of a scarf . . . and it is abundantly clear from hints in the text, and even larger hints outside it, that Edwin Drood was slain by strangling, and that the strangler used a scarf — Jasper's.

The outstanding mystery, these others aside, lies in the identity of Dick Datchery. He has been taken to be, quite obviously, Drood himself: and by many, Helena Landless — the grounds for this supposal lying in her having been described as running away from home, during her desperate childhood in Ceylon, dressed as a boy. The folklorist Andrew Lang thought Datchery might have been Helena's brother, Neville. A strong case has been made for his being Grewgious, Rosa's guardian, who has the distinction of being the only lawyer in Dickens' fiction with a clean bill of moral health: just as Crisparkle is the only clergyman, excepting one, ever to command the author's respect.

Kate Perugini, Dickens' daughter, believed that Datchery was Bazzard, Grewgious's clerk, on the grounds that he was interested in dramatics, and so might have been at home in a wig (though it must be said that Datchery seemed

curiously not at home in his). Others have seen in Datchery some floating member of the Drood family: a brother-in-law (this is most elaborate) of Crisparkle's mother: and, most inventively, Edwin Drood's real guardian, Jasper being only an unsatisfactory understudy in that role.

II

Essays discussing the way the story of *Edwin Drood* might have developed, and actual attempts at completing the tale, cover an even wider range of surmises than has been glanced at here. It is interesting, against such a background of often very free guesswork, to remind ourselves of what is known of Dickens' intentions. We return to those strong hints referred to earlier. The fullest of them were confided to Forster, who was told of the germ of the tale in a letter written by Dickens eleven months before his death. 'What should you think,' he was asked, 'of a story beginning in this way? — Two people, boy and girl, or very young, going apart from one another, pledged to be married after many years — at the end of the book. The interest to arise out of the tracing of their separate ways, and the impossibility of telling what will be done with that impending fate.' A few weeks later he had moved on: 'I laid aside that fancy I told you of, and have a very curious and new idea for my new story. Not a communicable idea (or the interest of the book would be gone), but a very strong one, though difficult to work.' But if not communicated by letter, and never entirely revealed, the story was still made known to Forster in not altogether cloudy outline: it 'was to be that of the murder of a nephew by his uncle; the originality of which was to consist in the review of the murderer's career by himself at the close, when its temptations were to be dwelt upon as if, not the culprit, but some other man, were the tempted. The last chapters were to be written in the condemned cell, to which his wickedness, all elaborately elicited from him as if

told of another, had brought him. Discovery by the murderer of the utter needlessness of the murder for its object, was to follow hard upon the commission of the deed; but all discovery of the murderer was to be baffled till towards the close, when, by means of a gold ring which had resisted the corrosive effects of the lime into which he had thrown the body, not only the person murdered was to be identified but the locality of the crime and the man who committed it. So much was told to me before any of the book was written; and it will be recollected that the ring, taken by Drood to be given to his betrothed only if their engagement went on, was brought away with him from their last interview. Rosa was to marry Tartar, and Crisparkle the sister of Landless, who was himself, I think, to have perished in assisting Tartar finally to unmask and seize the murderer.'

Other evidence comes from the cover of the monthly parts, which carried the usual design — much like the opening credits in a certain kind of film, giving promise of the character and drift of the tale to come. What Luke Fildes drew for *Edwin Drood*, acting on Dickens' instructions, cannot be taken as hard-and-fast evidence of anything, since Dickens had to give these instructions at a time when the writing had barely begun. Other cover designs of his had turned out to be, forgivably, inconsistent with the finished story. What is shown in the case of *Edwin Drood* is a double movement of events, one on each side of the title, with symbolic figures half-hidden in curtains at the top that indicate that one line of ascent is that of Good, the other that of Evil. The first leads clearly to Rosa's marriage in the cathedral, though we can't make out who the bridegroom is: the ascent, by way of a hand being passionately kissed and a woman peering at a poster headed LOST, owes its source to the fumes from Princess Puffer's pipe — oddly, since she belongs plainly to the strand of evil in the story. On the other side Jasper seems to be looking across bitterly at the bridal pair, while up a spiral staircase pursuers come,

pointing accusingly towards him (in a draft version of the design the pursuers were actually policemen): the source of the whole movement here being the fumes from a pipe being smoked by a Chinaman — presumably the opium-seller who is the Princess's rival. At bottom centre is a tableau that remains a puzzle: a young man, much like the bridegroom and wearing light clothes expressive of his being of the Good, is confronted by a man, holding a lantern, in the dark clothes of the Evil.

To these clues, two others may be added: that when out walking with his elder son Charles, Dickens said very clearly that Jasper had killed Drood; and that he had already proposed taking Luke Fildes to see the inside of Maidstone jail — which suggests that Forster was not mistaken in understanding that the novel would have its climax in the condemned cell.

III

That, then, is a brief history of the attempts to guess the direction *Edwin Drood* might have taken, and a resumé of the fairly meagre — but, it could be argued, also fairly suggestive — evidence which such conjecture ought to take into account.

Between all this, sometimes rather silly, detective work and the actual attempt to complete the novel there is an obvious gulf. There are two problems for the *Drood*-completer. The first is simply one of style. Most of these attempts have tripped at the very start over that huge obstacle which is Dickens' manner . . . a fabulously rich complexity of language and spirit. Perhaps never more than in *Edwin Drood* did Dickens demonstrate that, when it comes to great writing, narrative and voice are inextricable. Here is narrative at its most carefully organised: here is the voice at its most splendid, in one sense at least, since it had to be what it *freely* was, given any object whatever to

contemplate, together with what it *fixedly* must be, or what it must be within strict limits, in relation to obligatory details of intricate story-telling.

A characteristic example of the downfall of one continuator (George Sampson's curious word): someone who made his attempt in 1914 and whose best stroke was to mask himself with initials: W.E.C. In his version, Datchery, without his wig and walking 'with the elastic step of a man on the right side of thirty years of age,' has 'sauntered forth into the fresh air of a lovely summer's day', turning the mystery over in what emerges as a mind rather like that of an average late-Victorian contributor to *Punch*. He encounters a 'ruddy-faced plough boy' and asks him if there is an inn nearby.

> The boy, whose mouth was full to its utmost capacity, attempted to thrust the contents to one side and immediately something resembling half of a small, red apple appeared on the outside of his cheek.
>
> 'Huck, wuck, wuck,' he answered, jerking his thumb over his left shoulder.
>
> Mr Datchery regretted that Chinese was a language of which he had not the smallest knowledge. The boy let a portion of the contents of his cheek back into the working machinery of his mouth and recommenced chewing.
>
> Mr Datchery, watching the contour of the red-apple-like cheek grow perceptibly flatter, repeated his question.
>
> 'Huck, wuck, arn rooad,' began the boy, but becoming sensible after a gulp that a partial vacancy had occurred in his mouth he again raised the pork to his lips . . .

And so on. It reminds us that if Dickens is facetious, he is never feebly facetious: and that his jocosity always rests on an original vision of the thing he's joking about. It is the nature of the man's greatness: the constant originality of his viewpoint. He is barely capable of seeing things in a stale manner. He is always ready to bounce, as W.E.C. is bouncing: but it is never bouncing on the spot. When he lingers, he has the supreme gift of making his lingering seem like forward movement. He has in mind, always, the effect he wishes to have on the reader at this moment, part

of the effect he wishes to have over the whole sweep of the story: and, if you detach yourself, you feel Dickens' concern for such things at work on you as the reader. Anyone who is to convince us that he is, with any sort of plausibility, completing *Edwin Drood* must give us this sensation to which Dickens has accustomed us, of being, as it were, adventurously safe in his storyteller's hands. It is, indeed, a sensation, and it must be there.

So we need a 'continuator' with an original gift for language and storytelling not hopelessly unlike that of Dickens himself. But he must also be able to put himself — or to make the most sensitive attempt possible to put himself — into Dickens' shoes, *c.*1869–70. 'All too few of these mystery solvers,' Angus Wilson has justly thundered, 'are concerned with the fact that the mystery was invented by Dickens and not by themselves.' All too many of them, I think it might be added, have been concerned with the book as a puzzle, as 'an ordinary murder story'. This it quite plainly is not. It would be foolish to argue that the mysterious detail of the story is quite unimportant. Dickens wasn't perhaps the best plot-maker in the world: but of course it mattered that he offered his readers the exquisite pleasure of mystification with his enigmatic Datchery, his teasing keys and gold rings and ambiguous heaps of lime. Nevertheless, it must be true that, as his daughter Kate Perugini wrote thirty-six years after his death: 'Greatly as he was interested in the intricacies of that tangled skein, the information that he gave to Mr Forster, from whom he had withheld nothing for thirty years, certainly points to the fact that he was quite as deeply fascinated and absorbed in the study of the criminal Jasper, as in the dark and sinister crime that has given the book its title.'

It's that second problem that I believe the *Drood*-completer is faced with: that of thinking himself, and especially in relation to the fascination exerted on Dickens by Jasper, into the mind of that great dying man, a century

ago. It is so important, this *thinking* as the background to the writing of a continuation, that I believe it may be worthwhile for me to say, briefly, what I know was in Leon Garfield's own mind as he set to work. We talked a great deal about *Edwin Drood*, and about Jasper in particular. Was he really in his twenties? That curious unconvincingness of his being so young made one look hard at him, in terms of what one knew about Dickens' own condition at the time. Since 1858 he'd been in the position of having a mistress, the young actress Ellen Lawless Ternan, but being unable even to hint publicly at this plain central fact of his existence. It's difficult enough to calculate the effect on an ordinary Victorian of the refusal of the age to acknowledge the full truth of what it is to be human: what can have been the effect on a Victorian as deeply sensitive and aware as Dickens, and as professionally given to the exploration of human nature? The strain between public image and private reality must have been intolerable to him. Add to this that he was an ageing man — much older, physically, than his fifty-eight years: a shattered person, who needed a stick to walk with, whose hand went black during his last public readings from his work, who could not read the left-hand side of the names on shop fronts. He was an old, broken man, one of the most public men in England whose private life had to be a terrible secret. He was the broken, elderly lover of a very much younger woman . . .

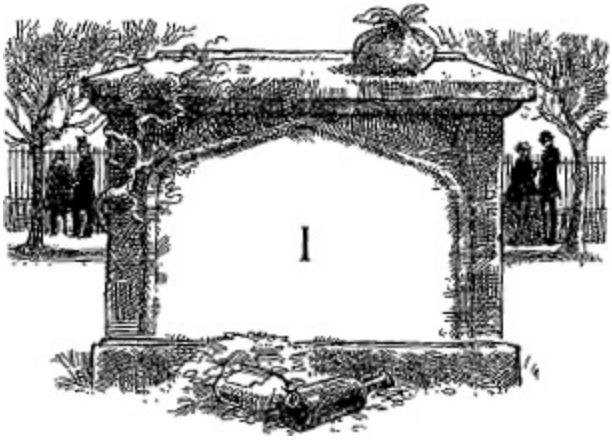
If he was 'deeply fascinated and absorbed in the study of the criminal Jasper', a man appallingly divided, whose dreadful final relief must come from having one half of himself condemned by the other half — and if he created a Jasper who, six-and-twenty according to the text, seems an infinitely older creature — are these facts of his fiction, so to speak, not most likely linked to his own condition, in real life?

'The divided man,' I remember Leon Garfield saying often in our discussions, 'must betray himself.'

Jasper, clearly, has problems — of passion, appetite, balked desire — that he cannot confess to because the society in which he lives (which is the society in which his creator lives, and the more intensely so because Cloisterham is the Rochester of his youth, of *Pickwick Papers*: the early jovial, laced with Gothic, having become the late sinister, Gothic triumphant) will not acknowledge the existence of those problems. He is subject to the Dean, as Dickens was subject to the British public — and for the Dean there can be only one response when human reality breaks through the smoothness of appearances and pretences: the evidence must be moved outside the sacred edifice.

In his notes for the first monthly number of *Edwin Drood* Dickens wrote: 'Touch the key note: "When the wicked man —".' The phrase is from Ezekiel 18:27: 'Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.'

I have three more memories of my discussions of *Edwin Drood* with Leon Garfield. The first was his interest in those curtains which frame the design for the cover of the monthly parts. Definitely a theatrical frontispiece, he thought: they seemed quite certainly to be proscenium curtains. The second was a remark at once light-hearted and deeply felt. 'I wish Dickens had finished *Drood*,' said this latest *Drood*-completer, 'and left others to begin it.' And the last memory is of his saying that, *had* Dickens finished the novel, it might have been impossible as well as unnecessary for Robert Louis Stevenson to write, sixteen years after Dickens' death, another great story reflecting the increasingly unbearable nature of Victorian dividedness: *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.



The Dawn

AN ANCIENT ENGLISH Cathedral Tower? How can the ancient English Cathedral tower be here! The well-known massive gray square tower of its old Cathedral? How can that be here! There is no spike of rusty iron in the air, between the eye and it, from any point of the real prospect. What is the spike that intervenes, and who has set it up? Maybe it is set up by the Sultan’s orders for the impaling of a horde of Turkish robbers, one by one. It is so, for cymbals clash, and the Sultan goes by to his palace in long procession. Ten thousand scimitars flash in the sunlight, and thrice ten thousand dancing-girls strew flowers. Then, follow white elephants caparisoned in countless gorgeous colours, and infinite in number and attendants. Still the Cathedral Tower rises in the background, where it cannot be, and still no writhing figure is on the grim spike. Stay! Is the spike so low a thing as the rusty spike on the top of a post of an old bedstead that has tumbled all awry? Some vague period of

drowsy laughter must be devoted to the consideration of this possibility.

Shaking from head to foot, the man whose scattered consciousness has thus fantastically pieced itself together, at length rises, supports his trembling frame upon his arms, and looks around. He is in the meanest and closest of small rooms. Through the ragged window-curtain, the light of early day steals in from a miserable court. He lies, dressed, across a large unseemly bed, upon a bedstead that has indeed given way under the weight upon it. Lying, also dressed and also across the bed, not longwise, are a Chinaman, a Lascar, and a haggard woman. The two first are in a sleep or stupor; the last is blowing at a kind of pipe, to kindle it. And as she blows, and shading it with her lean hand, concentrates its red spark of light, it serves in the dim morning as a lamp to show him what he sees of her.

'Another?' says this woman, in a querulous, rattling whisper. 'Have another?'

He looks about him, with his hand to his forehead.

'Ye've smoked as many as five since ye come in at midnight,' the woman goes on, as she chronically complains. 'Poor me, poor me, my head is so bad. Them two come in after ye. Ah, poor me, the business is slack, is slack! Few Chinamen about the Docks, and fewer Lascars, and no ships coming in, these say! Here's another ready for ye, deary. Ye'll remember like a good soul, won't ye, that the market price is dreffle high just now? More nor three shillings and sixpence for a thimbleful! And ye'll remember that nobody but me (and Jack Chinaman t'other side the court; but he can't do it as well as me) has the true secret of mixing it? Ye'll pay up accordingly, deary, won't ye?'

She blows at the pipe as she speaks, and, occasionally bubbling at it, inhales much of its contents.

“Unintelligible!”

‘O me, O me, my lungs is weak, my lungs is bad! It’s nearly ready for ye, deary. Ah, poor me, poor me, my poor hand shakes like to drop off! I see ye coming-to, and I ses to my poor self, “I’ll have another ready for him, and he’ll bear in mind the market price of opium, and pay according.” O my poor head! I makes my pipes of old penny ink-bottles, ye see, deary — this is one — and I fits-in a mouthpiece, this way, and I takes my mixter out of this thimble with this little horn spoon; and so I fills, deary. Ah, my poor nerves! I got Heavens-hard drunk for sixteen year afore I took to this; but this don’t hurt me, not to speak of. And it takes away the hunger as well as wittles, deary.’

She hands him the nearly-emptied pipe, and sinks back, turning over on her face.

He rises unsteadily from the bed, lays the pipe upon the hearthstone, draws back the ragged curtain, and looks with repugnance at his three companions. He notices that the

woman has opium-smoked herself into a strange likeness of the Chinaman. His form of cheek, eye, and temple, and his colour, are repeated in her. Said Chinaman convulsively wrestles with one of his many Gods or Devils, perhaps, and snarls horribly. The Lascar laughs and dribbles at the mouth. The hostess is still.

‘What visions can *she* have?’ the waking man muses, as he turns her face towards him, and stands looking down at it. ‘Visions of many butchers’ shops, and public-houses, and much credit? Of an increase of hideous customers, and this horrible bedstead set upright again, and this horrible court swept clean? What can she rise to, under any quantity of opium, higher than that! — Eh?’

He bends down his ear, to listen to her mutterings.

‘Unintelligible!’

As he watches the spasmodic shoots and darts that break out of her face and limbs, like fitful lightning out of a dark sky, some contagion in them seizes upon him: insomuch that he has to withdraw himself to a lean armchair by the hearth — placed there, perhaps, for such emergencies — and to sit in it, holding tight, until he has got the better of this unclean spirit of imitation.

Then he comes back, pounces on the Chinaman, and seizing him with both hands by the throat, turns him violently on the bed. The Chinaman clutches the aggressive hands, resists, gasps, and protests.

‘What do you say?’

A watchful pause.

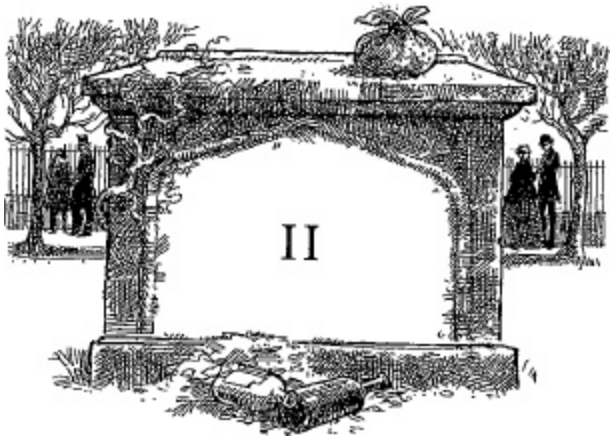
‘Unintelligible!’

Slowly loosening his grasp as he listens to the incoherent jargon with an attentive frown, he turns to the Lascar and fairly drags him forth upon the floor. As he falls, the Lascar starts into a half-risen attitude, glares with his eyes, lashes about him fiercely with his arms, and draws a phantom knife. It then becomes apparent that the woman has taken possession of this knife, for safety’s sake; for, she too

starting up, and restraining and expostulating with him, the knife is visible in her dress, not in his, when they drowsily drop back, side by side.

There has been chattering and clattering enough between them, but to no purpose. When any distinct word has been flung into the air, it has had no sense or sequence. Wherefore ‘unintelligible!’ is again the comment of the watcher, made with some reassured nodding of his head, and a gloomy smile. He then lays certain silver money on the table, finds his hat, gropes his way down the broken stairs, gives a good morning to some rat-ridden doorkeeper, in bed in a black hutch beneath the stairs, and passes out.

That same afternoon, the massive gray square tower of an old Cathedral rises before the sight of a jaded traveller. The bells are going for daily vesper service, and he must needs attend it, one would say, from his haste to reach the open Cathedral door. The choir are getting on their sullied white robes, in a hurry, when he arrives among them, gets on his own robe, and falls into the procession filing in to service. Then, the Sacristan locks the iron-barred gates that divide the sanctuary from the chancel, and all of the procession having scuttled into their places, hide their faces; and then the intoned words, ‘WHEN THE WICKED MAN —’ rise among groins of arches and beams of roof, awakening muttered thunder.



II

A Dean, and a Chapter Also

WHOSOEVER HAS OBSERVED that sedate and clerical bird, the rook, may perhaps have noticed that when he wings his way homeward towards nightfall, in a sedate and clerical company, two rooks will suddenly detach themselves from the rest, will retrace their flight for some distance, and will there poise and linger; conveying to mere men the fancy that it is of some occult importance to the body politic, that this artful couple should pretend to have renounced connection with it.

Similarly, service being over in the old Cathedral with the square tower, and the choir scuffling out again, and divers venerable persons of rook-like aspect dispersing, two of these latter retrace their steps, and walk together in the echoing Close.

Not only is the day waning, but the year. The low sun is fiery and yet cold behind the monastery ruin, and the Virginia creeper on the Cathedral wall has showered half its deep-red leaves down on the pavement. There has been rain this afternoon, and a wintry shudder goes among the little pools on the cracked, uneven flag-stones, and through the giant elm-trees as they shed a gust of tears. Their fallen leaves lie strewn thickly about. Some of these leaves, in a timid rush, seek sanctuary within the low arched Cathedral door; but two men coming out resist them, and cast them forth again with their feet; this done, one of the two locks the door with a goodly key, and the other flits away with a folio music-book.

‘Mr. Jasper was that, Tope?’

‘Yes, Mr. Dean.’

‘He has stayed late.’

‘Yes, Mr. Dean. I have stayed for him, your Reverence. He has been took a little poorly.’

‘Say “taken,” Tope — to the Dean,’ the younger rook interposes in a low tone with this touch of correction, as who should say: ‘You may offer bad grammar to the laity, or the humbler clergy, not to the Dean.’

Mr. Tope, Chief Verger and Showman, and accustomed to be high with excursion parties, declines with a silent loftiness to perceive that any suggestion has been tendered to him.

‘And when and how has Mr. Jasper been taken—for, as Mr. Crisparkle has remarked, it is better to say taken — taken —’ repeats the Dean; ‘when and how has Mr. Jasper been Taken —’

‘Taken, sir,’ Tope deferentially murmurs.

‘— Poorly, Tope?’

‘Why, sir, Mr. Jasper was that breathed —’

‘I wouldn’t say “That breathed,” Tope,’ Mr. Crisparkle interposes with the same touch as before. ‘Not English — to the Dean.’

‘Breathed to that extent,’ the Dean (not unflattered by this indirect homage) condescendingly remarks, ‘would be preferable.’

‘Mr. Jasper’s breathing was so remarkably short’ — thus discreetly does Mr. Tope work his way round the sunken rock — ‘when he came in, that it distressed him mightily to get his notes out: which was perhaps the cause of his having a kind of fit on him after a little. His memory grew DAZED.’ Mr. Tope, with his eyes on the Reverend Mr. Crisparkle, shoots this word out, as defying him to improve upon it: ‘and a dimness and giddiness crept over him as strange as ever I saw: though he didn’t seem to mind it particularly, himself. However, a little time and a little water brought him out of his DAZE.’ Mr. Tope repeats the word and its emphasis, with

the air of saying: ‘As I *have* made a success, I’ll make it again.’

‘And Mr. Jasper has gone home quite himself, has he?’ asked the Dean.

‘Your Reverence, he has gone home quite himself. And I’m glad to see he’s having his fire kindled up, for it’s chilly after the wet, and the Cathedral had both a damp feel and a damp touch this afternoon, and he was very shivery.’

They all three look towards an old stone gatehouse crossing the Close, with an arched thoroughfare passing beneath it. Through its latticed window, a fire shines out upon the fast-darkening scene, involving in shadow the pendant masses of ivy and creeper covering the building’s front. As the deep Cathedral-bell strikes the hour, a ripple of wind goes through these at their distance, like a ripple of the solemn sound that hums through tomb and tower, broken niche and defaced statue, in the pile close at hand.

‘Is Mr. Jasper’s nephew with him?’ the Dean asks.

‘No, sir,’ replied the Verger, ‘but expected. There’s his own solitary shadow betwixt his two windows — the one looking this way, and the one looking down into the High Street — drawing his own curtains now.’

‘Well, well,’ says the Dean, with a sprightly air of breaking up the little conference, ‘I hope Mr. Jasper’s heart may not be too much set upon his nephew. Our affections, however laudable, in this transitory world, should never master us; we should guide them, guide them. I find I am not disagreeably reminded of my dinner, by hearing my dinner-bell. Perhaps, Mr. Crisparkle, you will, before going home, look in on Jasper?’

‘Certainly, Mr. Dean. And tell him that you had the kindness to desire to know how he was?’

‘Ay; do so, do so. Certainly. Wished to know how he was. By all means. Wished to know how he was.’

With a pleasant air of patronage, the Dean as nearly cocks his quaint hat as a Dean in good spirits may, and directs his

comely gaiters towards the ruddy dining-room of the snug old red-brick house where he is at present, ‘in residence’ with Mrs. Dean and Miss Dean.

Mr. Crisparkle, Minor Canon, fair and rosy, and perpetually pitching himself head-foremost into all the deep running water in the surrounding country; Mr. Crisparkle, Minor Canon, early riser, musical, classical, cheerful, kind, good-natured, social, contented, and boy-like; Mr. Crisparkle, Minor Canon and good man, lately ‘Coach’ upon the chief Pagan high roads, but since promoted by a patron (grateful for a well-taught son) to his present Christian beat; betakes himself to the gatehouse, on his way home to his early tea.

‘Sorry to hear from Tope that you have not been well, Jasper.’

‘O, it was nothing, nothing!’

‘You look a little worn.’

‘Do I? O, I don’t think so. What is better, I don’t feel so. Tope has made too much of it, I suspect. It’s his trade to make the most of everything appertaining to the Cathedral, you know.’

‘I may tell the Dean — I call expressly from the Dean — that you are all right again?’

The reply, with a slight smile, is: ‘Certainly; with my respects and thanks to the Dean.’

‘I’m glad to hear that you expect young Drood.’

‘I expect the dear fellow every moment.’

‘Ah! He will do you more good than a doctor, Jasper.’

‘More good than a dozen doctors. For I love him dearly, and I don’t love doctors, or doctors’ stuff.’

Mr. Jasper is a dark man of some six-and-twenty, with thick, lustrous, well-arranged black hair and whiskers. He looks older than he is, as dark men often do. His voice is deep and good, his face and figure are good, his manner is a little sombre. His room is a little sombre, and may have had its influence in forming his manner. It is mostly in shadow. Even when the sun shines brilliantly, it seldom touches the

grand piano in the recess, or the folio music-books on the stand, or the book-shelves on the wall, or the unfinished picture of a blooming schoolgirl hanging over the chimneypiece; her flowing brown hair tied with a blue riband, and her beauty remarkable for a quite childish, almost babyish, touch of saucy discontent, comically conscious of itself. (There is not the least artistic merit in this picture, which is a mere daub; but it is clear that the painter has made it humorously — one might almost say, revengefully — like the original.)

‘We shall miss you, Jasper, at the “Alternate Musical Wednesdays” tonight; but no doubt you are best at home. Good-night. God bless you! “Tell me, shep-herds, te-e-ell me; tell me-e-e, have you seen (have you seen, have you seen, have you seen) my-y-y Flo-o-ora-a pass this way!”’ Melodiously good Minor Canon the Reverend Septimus Crisparkle thus delivers himself, in musical rhythm, as he withdraws his amiable face from the doorway and conveys it down-stairs.

Sounds of recognition and greeting pass between the Reverend Septimus and somebody else, at the stair-foot. Mr. Jasper listens, starts from his chair, and catches a young fellow in his arms, exclaiming:

‘My dear Edwin!’

‘My dear Jack! So glad to see you!’

‘Get off your greatcoat, bright boy, and sit down here in your own corner. Your feet are not wet? Pull your boots off. Do pull your boots off.’

‘My dear Jack, I am as dry as a bone. Don’t moddley-coddley, there’s a good fellow. I like anything better than being moddley-coddleyed.’

With the check upon him of being unsympathetically restrained in a genial outburst of enthusiasm, Mr. Jasper stands still, and looks on intently at the young fellow, divesting himself of his outward coat, hat, gloves, and so forth. Once for all, a look of intentness and intensity — a

look of hungry, exacting, watchful, and yet devoted affection — is always, now and ever afterwards, on the Jasper face whenever the Jasper face is addressed in this direction. And whenever it is so addressed, it is never, on this occasion or on any other, dividedly addressed; it is always concentrated.

‘Now I am right, and now I’ll take my corner, Jack. Any dinner, Jack?’

Mr. Jasper opens a door at the upper end of the room, and discloses a small inner room pleasantly lighted and prepared, wherein a comely dame is in the act of setting dishes on table.

‘What a jolly old Jack it is!’ cries the young fellow, with a clap of his hands. ‘Look here, Jack; tell me; whose birthday is it?’

‘Not yours, I know,’ Mr. Jasper answers, pausing to consider.

‘Not mine, you know? No; not mine, *I* know! Pussy’s!’

Fixed as the look the young fellow meets, is, there is yet in it some strange power of suddenly including the sketch over the chimneypiece.

‘Pussy’s, Jack! We must drink Many happy returns to her. Come, uncle; take your dutiful and sharp-set nephew in to dinner.’

As the boy (for he is little more) lays a hand on Jasper’s shoulder, Jasper cordially and gaily lays a hand on *his* shoulder, and so Marseillaise-wise they go in to dinner.

‘And, Lord! here’s Mrs. Tope!’ cries the boy. ‘Lovelier than ever!’

‘Never you mind me, Master Edwin,’ retorts the Verger’s wife; ‘I can take care of myself.’

‘You can’t. You’re much too handome. Give me a kiss because it’s Pussy’s birthday.’

‘I’d Pussy you, young man, if I was Pussy, as you call her,’ Mrs. Tope blushingly retorts, after being saluted. ‘Your uncle’s too much wrapt up in you that’s where it is. He

makes so much of you, that it’s my opinion you think you’ve only to call your Pussys by the dozen, to make ’em come.’

‘You forget, Mrs. Tope,’ Mr. Jasper interposes, taking his place at the table with a genial smile, ‘and so do you, Ned, that Uncle and Nephew are words prohibited here by common consent and express agreement. For what we are going to receive His holy name be praised!’

‘Done like the Dean! Witness, Edwin Drood! Please to carve, Jack, for I can’t.’

This sally ushers in the dinner. Little to the present purpose, or to any purpose, is said, while it is in course of being disposed of. At length the cloth is drawn, and a dish of walnuts and a decanter of rich-coloured sherry are placed upon the table.

‘I say! Tell me, Jack,’ the young fellow then flows on: ‘do you really and truly feel as if the mention of our relationship divided us at all? *I* don’t.’

‘Uncles as a rule, Ned, are so much older than their nephews,’ is the reply, ‘that I have that feeling instinctively.’

‘As a rule! Ah, may-be! But what is a difference in age of half-a-dozen years or so? And some uncles, in large families, are even younger than their nephews. By George, I wish it was the case with us!’

‘Why?’

‘Because if it was, I’d take the lead with you, Jack, and be as wise as Begone, dull Care! that turned a young man gray, and Begone, dull Care! that turned an old man to clay. — Halloa, Jack! Don’t drink.’

‘Why not?’

‘Asks why not, on Pussy’s birthday, and no Happy returns proposed! Pussy, Jack, and many of ’em! Happy returns, I mean.’

Laying an affectionate and laughing touch on the boy’s extended hand, as if it were at once his giddy head and his light heart, Mr. Jasper drinks the toast in silence.