CHAPTER XVII
The Great Change in the Prospects of Sweeney Todd

As Sweeney Todd's object, so far as regarded the moneylender having seen the carriage, was fully answered, he had no objection to enter the house, which he accordingly did at once, being preceded by John Mundel, who became each moment more and more impressed with the fact, as he considered it, that his guest was some person of very great rank and importance in society. He ushered him into a splendidly furnished apartment, and after offering him refreshments, which Sweeney Todd politely declined, he waited with no small degree of impatience for his visitor to be more explicit with regard to the object of his visit.

"I should," said Sweeney Todd, "have myself accommodated the illustrious lady with the sum of money she requires, but as I could not do so without incumbering some estates, she positively forbade me to think of it."

"Certainly," said Mr. Mundel, "she is a very illustrious lady, I presume?"

"Very illustrious indeed, but it must be a condition of this transaction, if you at all enter into it, that you are not to inquire precisely who she is, nor are you to inquire precisely who I am."

"It's not my usual way of conducting business, but if everything else be satisfactory, I shall not cavil at that."

"Very good; by everything else being satisfactory, I presume you mean the security offered?"

"Why, yes, that is of great importance, my lord."

"I informed the illustrious lady, that, as the affair was to be wrapped up in something of a mystery, the security must be extremely ample."

"That's a very proper view to take of the matter, my lord. I wonder," thought John Mundel, "if he is a duke; I'll call him 'your grace' next time, and see if he objects to it."

"Therefore," continued Sweeney Todd, "the illustrious lady placed in my hands security to a third greater amount than she required."

"Certainly, certainly, a very proper arrangement, your grace; may I ask the nature of the proffered security?"

"Jewels."

"Highly satisfactory and unexceptionable security; they go into a small space, and do not deteriorate in value."

"And if they do," said the barber, "deteriorate in value, it would make no difference to you, for the illustrious person's honour would be committed to your redemption."

"I don't doubt that, your grace, in the least; I merely made the remark incidentally, quite incidentally."

"Of course, of course; and I trust, before going further, that you are quite in a position to enter into this subject."

"Certainly I am, and, I am proud to say, to any amount. Show me the money's worth, your grace, and I will show you the money — that's my way of doing business; and no one can say that John Mundel ever shrunk from a matter that was brought fairly before him, and that he considered worth his going into."

"It was by hearing such a character of you that I was induced to come to you. What do you think of that?"

Sweeney Todd took from his pocket, with a careless air, the string of pearls, and cast them down before the eyes of the moneylender, who took them up and ran them rapidly through his fingers for a few seconds before he said —

"I thought there was but one string like this in the kingdom, and those belonged to the Queen."

"Well," said Sweeney Todd.

"I humbly beg your grace's pardon. How much money does your grace require on these pearls?"

"Twelve thousand pounds is their current value, if a sale of them was enforced; eight thousand pounds are required of you on their security."

"Eight thousand is a large sum. As a general thing I lend but half the value upon anything; but in this case, to oblige your grace and the illustrious personage, I do not, of course, hesitate for one moment but shall for one month lend you the required amount."

"That will do," said Sweeney Todd, scarcely concealing the exultation he felt at getting so much more from John Mundel than he expected, and which he certainly would not have got if the moneylender had not been most fully and completely impressed with the idea that the pearls belonged to the Queen, and that he had actually at length majesty itself for a customer. He did not suppose for one moment that it was the queen who wanted the money; but his view of the case was, that she had lent the pearls to this nobleman to meet some exigency of his own, and that, of course, they would be redeemed very shortly. Altogether a more pleasant transaction for John Mundel could not have been imagined. It was just the sort of thing he would have looked out for, and had the greatest satisfaction in bringing to a conclusion, and he considered it was

opening the door to the highest class of business in his way that he was capable of doing.

"In what name, your grace," he said, "shall I draw a cheque upon my banker?"

"In the name of Colonel George."

"Certainly, certainly; and if your grace will give me an acknowledgment for eight thousand pounds, and please to understand that at the end of a month from this time the transaction will be renewed if necessary, I will give you a cheque for seven thousand five hundred pounds."

"Why seven thousand five hundred only, when you mentioned eight thousand pounds?"

"The five hundred pounds is my little commission upon the transaction. Your grace will perceive that I appreciate highly the honour of your grace's custom, and consequently charge the lowest possible price. I can assure your grace I could get more for my money by a great deal, but the pleasure of being able to meet your grace's views is so great, that I am willing to make a sacrifice, and therefore it is that I say five hundred, when I really ought to say one thousand pounds, taking into consideration the great scarcity of money at the present juncture; and I can assure your grace that —"

"Peace, peace," said Sweeney Todd; "and if it be not convenient to redeem the jewels at the end of a month from this time, you will hear from me most assuredly."

"I am quite satisfied of that," said John Mundel, and he accordingly drew a cheque for seven thousand five hundred pounds, which he handed to Sweeney Todd, who put it in his pocket, not a little delighted that at last he had got rid of his pearls, even at a price so far beneath their real value.

"I need scarcely urge upon you, Mr. Mundel," he said, "the propriety of keeping this affair profoundly secret."

"Indeed you need not, your grace, for it is part of my business to be discreet and cautious. I should very soon have nothing to do in my line, your grace may depend, if I were to talk about it. No, this transaction will for ever remain locked up in my own breast, and no living soul but your grace and I need know what has occurred."

With this, John Mundel showed Sweeney Todd to his carriage, with abundance of respect, and in two minutes more he was travelling along towards town with what might be considered a small fortune in his pocket. We should have noticed earlier that Sweeney Todd had, upon the occasion of his going to sell the pearls to the lapidary, in the city, made some great alterations in his appearance, so that it was not likely he should be recognised again to a positive certainly. For example — having no whiskers whatever of his own, he had put

on a large black pair of false ones, as well as moustachios, and he had given some colour to his cheeks likewise which had so completely altered his appearance, that those who were most intimate with him would not have known him except by his voice, and that he took good care to alter in his intercourse with John Mundel, so that it should not become a future means of detection.

"I thought that this would succeed," he muttered to himself, as he went towards town, "and I have not been deceived. For three months longer, and only three, I will carry on the business in Fleet Street, so that any sudden alteration in my fortunes may not give rise to suspicion."

He was then silent for some minutes, during which he appeared to be revolving some very knotty question in his brain, and then he said, suddenly —

"Well, well, as regards Tobias, I think it will be safer, unquestionably, to put him out of the way by taking his life, than to try to dispose of him in a madhouse, and I think there are one or two more persons whom it will be highly necessary to prevent being mischievous, at all events at present. I must think — I must think."

When such a man as Sweeney Todd set about thinking, there could be no possible doubt but that some serious mischief was meditated, and any one who could have watched his face during that ride home from the moneylender's, would have seen by its expression that the thoughts which agitated him were of a dark and desperate character, and such as anybody but himself would have shrunk from aghast. But he was not a man to shrink from anything, and, on the contrary, the more a set of circumstances presented themselves in a gloomy and a terrific aspect, the better they seemed to suit him, and the peculiar constitution of his mind. There can be no doubt but that the love of money was the predominant feeling in Sweeney Todd's intellectual organization, and that, by the amount it would bring him, or the amount it would deprive him of, he measured everything. With such a man, then, no question of morality or ordinary feeling could arise, and there can be no doubt that he would quite willingly have sacrificed the whole human race, if, by so doing, he could have achieved any of the objects of his ambition. And so, on his road homeward, he probably made up his mind to plunge still deeper into criminality, and perchance to indulge in acts that a man not already so deeply versed in iniquity would have shrunk from with the most positive terror. And by a strange style of reasoning, such men as Sweeney Todd reconcile themselves to the most heinous crimes upon the ground of what they call policy. That is to say, that having committed some serious offence, they are compelled to commit a great number more for the purpose of endeavouring to avoid the consequences of the first lot, and hence the continuance of criminality becomes a matter necessary to self-defence, and an essential ingredient in their consideration of self-preservation. Probably Sweeney Todd had been for the greater part of his life, aiming at the possession of extensive pecuniary resources, and, no doubt, by the aid of a superior intellect, and a mind full of craft and design, he had managed to make others subservient to his views; and now that those views were answered, and that his underlings and accomplices were no longer

required, they became positively dangerous. He was well aware of that cold-blooded policy which teaches that it is far safer to destroy than to cast away the tools by which a man carves his way to power and fortune.

"They shall die," said Sweeney Todd — "dead men tell no tales, nor women nor boys either, and they shall all die; after which there will, I think, be a serious fire in Fleet Street. Ha! Ha! It may spread to what mischief it likes, always provided it stops not short of the entire destruction of my house and premises. Rare sport — rare sport will it be to me, for then I will at once commence a new career, in which the barber will be forgotten, and the man of fashion only seen and remembered, for with this sad addition to my means, I am fully capable of vying with the highest and the noblest, let them be whom they may."

This seemed a pleasant train of reflections to Sweeney Todd, and as the coach entered Fleet Street, there sat such a grim smile upon his countenance that he looked like some fiend in human shape, who had just completed the destruction of a human soul. When he reached the livery stables to which he directed them to drive, instead of his own shop, he rewarded all who had gone with him most liberally, so that the coachman and footman, who were both servants out of place, would have had no objection for Sweeney Todd every day to have gone on some such an expedition, so that they should receive as liberal wages for the small part they enacted in it as they did upon that occasion. He then walked from the stables toward his own house, but upon reaching there a little disappointment awaited him, for he found to his surprise that no light was burning; and when he placed his hand upon the shop door, it opened, but there was no trace of Tobias, although he, Sweeney Todd, called loudly upon him the moment he set foot within the shop. Then a feeling of apprehension crept across the barber, and he groped anxiously about for some matches, by the aid of which he hoped to procure a light, and then an explanation of the mysterious absence of Tobias. But in order that we may, in its proper form, relate how it was that Tobias had had the daring thus, in open contradiction of his master, to be away from the shop, we must devote to Tobias a chapter, which will plead his extenuation.

CHAPTER XVIII
Tobias's Adventures during the Absence of Sweeney Todd

Tobias guessed, and guessed rightly too, that when Sweeney Todd said he would be away half an hour, he only mentioned that short period of time, in order to keep the lad's vigilance on the alert, and to prevent him from taking any advantage of a more protracted absence. The very style and manner in which he had gone out, precluded the likelihood of it being for so short a period of time; and that circumstance set Tobias seriously thinking over a situation which was becoming more intolerable every day. The lad had the sense to feel that he could not go on much longer as he was going on, and that in a short time such a life would destroy him.

"It is beyond endurance," he said, "and I know not what to do; and since Sweeney Todd has told me that the boy he had before went out of his senses, and is now in the cell of a madhouse, I feel that such will be my fate, and that I too shall come to that dreadful end, and then no one will believe a word I utter, but consider everything to be mere raving."

After a time, as the darkness increased, he lit the lamp which hung in the shop, and which, until it was closed for the night, usually shed a dim ray from the window. Then he sat down to think again, and he said to himself —

"If I could now but summon courage to ask my mother about this robbery which Sweeney Todd imputes to her, she might assure me it was false, and that she never did such a deed; but then it is dreadful for me to ask her such a question, because it may be true; and then, how shocking it would be for her to be forced to confess to me, her own son, such a circumstance."

These were the honourable feelings which prevented Tobias from questioning his mother as regarded Todd's accusation of her — an accusation too dreadful to believe implicitly, and yet sufficiently probable for him to have a strong suspicion that it might be true after all. It is to be deeply regretted that Tobias's philosophy did not carry him a little further, and make him see, the moment the charge was made, that he ought unquestionably to investigate it to the very utmost. But still we could hardly expect, from a mere boy, that acute reasoning and power of action, which depend so much upon the knowledge of the world and an extensive practice in the usages of society. It was sufficient if he felt correctly — we could scarcely expect him to reason so. But upon this occasion, above all others, he seemed completely overcome by the circumstances which surrounded him; and from his excited manner, one might have almost imagined that the insanity he himself predicted at the close of his career was really not far off. He wrung his hands, and he wept, every now and then, in sad speech, bitterly bemoaning his situation, until at length, with a sudden resolution, he sprang to his feet, exclaiming —

"This night shall end it. I can endure it no more. I will fly from this place, and seek my fortune elsewhere. Any amount of distress, danger, or death itself even, is preferable to the dreadful life I lead."

He walked some paces towards the door, and then he paused, as he said to himself in a low tone —

"Todd will surely not be home yet awhile, and why should I then neglect the only opportunity I may ever have of searching this house to satisfy my mind as regards any of the mysteries that it contains?"

He paused over this thought, and considered well its danger, for dangerous indeed it was to no small extent, but he was desperate; and with a resolution that scarcely could have been expected from him, he determined upon taking that step, above all others, which Todd was almost sure to punish with death. He closed the shop door, and bolted it upon the inside, so that he could not be suddenly interrupted, and then he looked round him carefully for some weapon, by the aid of which he should be able to break his way into the parlour, which the barber always kept closed and locked in his absence. A weapon that would answer the purpose of breaking any lock, if he, Tobias, chose to proceed so roughly to work, was close at hand in the iron bar, which, when the place was closed at night, secured a shutter to the door. Wrought up as he was to almost frenzy, Tobias seized this bar, and, advancing towards the parlour door, he with one blow smashed the lock to atoms, and the door yielded. The moment it did so, there was a crash of glass, and when Tobias entered the room he saw that upon its threshold lay a wine glass shattered to atoms, and he felt certain that it had been placed in some artful position by Sweeney Todd as a detector, when he should return, of any attempt that had been made upon the door of the parlour. And now Tobias felt that he was so far committed that he might as well go on with his work, and accordingly he lit a candle, which he found upon the parlour table, and then proceeded to make what discoveries he could. Several of the cupboards in the room yielded at once to his hands, and in them he found nothing remarkable; but there was one that he could not open; so, without a moment's hesitation, he had recourse to the bar of iron again, and broke its lock, when the door swung open, — and to his astonishment there tumbled out of this cupboard such a volley of hats of all sorts and descriptions, some looped with silver, some three-cornered, and some square, that they formed quite a museum of that article of attire, and excited the greatest surprise in the mind of Tobias, at the same time that they tended very greatly to confirm some other thoughts and feelings which he had concerning Sweeney Todd. This was the only cupboard which was fast, although there was another door which looked as if it opened into one, but when Tobias broke that down with the bar of iron, he found it was the door which led to the staircase conducting to the upper part of the house — that upper part which Sweeney Todd, with all his avarice, would never let, and of which the shutters were kept continually closed, so that the opposite neighbours never caught a glimpse into any of the apartments. With cautious and slow steps, which he adopted instantaneously, although he knew that there was no one in the house but himself, Tobias ascended the staircase.

"I will go to the very top rooms first," he said to himself, "and so examine them all as I come down, and then if Todd should return suddenly, I shall have a better chance of hearing him, than as if I began below and went upwards."

Acting upon this prudent scheme, he went up to the attics, all the doors of which were swinging open, and there was nothing in any of them whatever. He descended to the second floor with the like result, and a feeling of great disappointment began to creep over him at the thought that, after all, the barber's house might not repay the trouble of examination. But when he reached the first floor he soon found abundant reason to alter his opinion. The doors were fast, and he had to burst them open; and, when he got in, he found that those rooms were partially furnished, and that they contained a great quantity of miscellaneous property of all kinds and descriptions. In one corner was an enormous quantity of walking sticks, some of which were of a very costly and expensive character, with gold and silver chased tops to them, and in another corner was a great number of umbrellas — in fact, at least a hundred of them. Then there were boots and shoes lying upon the floor, partially covered up, as if to keep them from dirt; there were thirty or forty swords of different styles and patterns, many of them appearing to be very firm blades, and in one or two cases the scabbards were richly ornamented. At one end of the front and larger of these two rooms, was an old-fashioned looking bureau of great size, and with as much woodwork in it as seemed required to make at least a couple of such articles of furniture. This was very securely locked, and presented more difficulties in the way of opening it than any of the doors had done, for the lock was of great strength and apparent durability. Moreover it was not so easily got at, but at length by using the bar as a sort of lever, instead of as a mere machine to strike with, Tobias succeeded in forcing this bureau open, and then his eyes were perfectly dazzled with the amount of jewellery and trinkets of all kinds and descriptions that were exhibited to his gaze. There was a great number of watches, gold chains, silver and gold snuff boxes, and a large assortment of rings, shoe buckles, and brooches. These articles must have been of great value, and Tobias could not help exclaiming aloud —

"How could Sweeney Todd come by these articles, except by the murder of their owners?"

This, indeed, seemed but too probable a supposition, and the more especially so, as in a further part of this bureau a great quantity of apparel was found by Tobias. He stood with a candle in his hand, looking upon these various objects for more than a quarter of an hour, and then as a sudden and a natural thought came across him of how completely a few of them even would satisfy his wants and his mother's for a long time to come, he stretched forth his hand towards the glittering mass, but he drew it back again with a shudder, saying —

"No — no, these things are the plunder of the dead. Let Sweeney Todd keep them to himself, and look upon them, if he can, with eyes of enjoyment. I will have none of them; they would bring misfortune along with every guinea that they might be turned into."

As he spoke, he heard St. Dunstan's clock strike nine, and he started at the sound, for it let him know that already Sweeney Todd had been away an hour beyond the time he said he would be absent, so that there was a probability of his quick return now, and it would scarcely be safe to linger longer in his house.

"I must be gone — I must be gone. I should like to look upon my mother's face once more before I leave London for ever perhaps. I may tell her of the danger she is in from Todd's knowledge of her secret; no — no, I cannot speak to her of that; I must go, and leave her to those chances which I hope and trust will work favourably for her."

Flinging down the iron bar which had done him such good service, Tobias stopped not to close any of those receptacles which contained the plunder that Sweeney Todd had taken most probably from murdered persons, but he rushed downstairs into the parlour again, where the boots that had fallen out of the cupboard still lay upon the floor in wild disorder. It was a strange and sudden whim that took him, rather than a matter of reflection, that induced him, instead of his own hat, to take one of those which were lying so indiscriminately at his feet; and he did so. By mere accident it turned out to be an exceedingly handsome hat, of rich workmanship and material, and then Tobias, feeling terrified lest Sweeney Todd should return before he could leave the place, paid no attention to anything, but turned from the shop, merely pulling the door after him, and then darting over the road towards the Temple like a hunted hare; for his great wish was to see his mother, and then he had an undefined notion that his best plan for escaping the clutches of Sweeney Todd would be to go to sea. In common with all boys of his age, who know nothing whatever of the life of a sailor, it presented itself in the most fascinating colours. A sailor ashore and a sailor afloat, are about as two different things as the world can present; but, to the imagination of Tobias Ragg, a sailor was somebody who was always dancing hornpipes, spending money, and telling wonderful stories. No wonder, then, that the profession presented itself under such fascinating colours to all such persons as Tobias; and as it seemed, and seems still, to be a sort of general understanding that the real condition of a sailor should be mystified in every possible way and shape by both novelist and dramatist, it is no wonder that it requires actual experience to enable those parties who are in the habit of being carried away by just what they hear, to come to a correct conclusion.

"I will go to sea!" ejaculated Tobias. "Yes, I will go to sea!"

As he spoke these words he passed out of the gate of the Temple leading into Whitefriars, in which ancient vicinity his mother dwelt, endeavouring to eke out a living as best she might. She was very much surprised (for she happened to be at home) at the unexpected visit of her son, Tobias, and uttered a faint scream as she let fall a flatiron very nearly upon his toes.

"Mother," he said, "I cannot stay with Sweeney Todd any longer, so do not ask me."

"Not stay with such a respectable man?"

"A respectable man, mother! Alas, alas, how little you know of him! But what am I saying? I dare not speak! Oh, that fatal, fatal candlestick!"

"But how are you to live, and what do you mean by a fatal candlestick?"

"Forgive me — I did not mean to say that! Farewell, mother! I am going to sea."

"To see what, my dear?" said Mrs. Ragg, who was much more difficult to talk to, than even Hamlet's gravedigger. "You don't know how much I am obliged to Sweeney Todd."

"Yes, I do, and that's what drives me mad to think of. Farewell, mother, perhaps for ever! If I can, of course I will communicate with you, but now I dare not stay."

"Oh! What have you done, Tobias — what have you done?"

"Nothing — nothing! But Sweeney Todd is — "

"What — what?"

"No matter — no matter! Nothing — nothing! And yet at this last moment I am almost tempted to ask you concerning a candlestick."

"Don't mention that," said Mrs. Ragg; "I don't want to hear anything said about it."

"It is true, then?"

"Yes; but did Mr. Todd tell you?"

"He did — he did. I have now asked the question I never thought could have passed my lips. Farewell, mother; for ever farewell!"

Tobias rushed out of the place, leaving old Mrs. Ragg astonished at his behaviour, and with a strong suspicion that some accession of insanity had come over him.

"The Lord have mercy upon us!" she said, "What shall I do? I am astonished at Mr. Todd telling him about the candlestick; it's true enough, though, for all that. I recollect it as well as though it were yesterday; it was a very hard winter, and I was minding a set of chambers, when Todd came to shave the gentleman, and I saw him with my own eyes put a silver candlestick in his pocket. Then I went over to his shop and reasoned with him about it, and he gave it me back again, and I brought it to the chambers, and laid it down exactly on the spot where he took it from."

“To be sure,” said Mrs. Ragg, after a pause of a few moments, “to be sure, he has been a very good friend to me ever since, but that I suppose is for fear I should tell, and get him hung or transported. But, however, we must take the good with the bad, and when Tobias comes to think of it, he will go back again to his work, I dare say; for, after all, it’s a very foolish thing for him to trouble his head whether Mr. Todd stole a silver candlestick or not.”

Tobias Discovers The Barber's Hidden Plunder.

CHAPTER XIX
The Strange Odour in Old St. Dunstan's Church

About this time, and while the incidents of our most strange and eventful narrative were taking place, the pious frequenters of old St. Dunstan's church began to perceive a strange and most abominable odour throughout that sacred edifice. It was in vain that old women who came to hear the sermons, although they were too deaf to catch a third part of them, brought smelling bottles and other means of stifling their noses; still that dreadful charnel house sort of smell would make itself most painfully and most disagreeably apparent. And the Rev. Joseph Stillingport, who was the regular preacher, smelt it in the pulpit; and had been seen to sneeze in the midst of a most pious discourse indeed, and to hold to his pious mouth a handkerchief, in which was some strong and pungent essence, for the purpose of trying to overcome the horrible effluvia. The organ blower and the organ player were both nearly stifled, for the horrible odour seemed to ascend to the upper part of the church; although those who sat in what may be called the pit, by no means escaped it. The churchwardens looked at each other in their pews with contorted countenances, and were almost afraid to breathe; and the only person who did not complain bitterly of the dreadful odour in St. Dunstan's church, was an old woman who had been a pew opener for many years; but then she had lost the faculties of her nose, which, perhaps, accounted satisfactorily for that circumstance. At length, however, the nuisance became so intolerable, that the beadle, whose duty it was in the morning to open the church doors, used to come up to them with the massive key in one hand, and a cloth soaked in vinegar in the other, just as the people used to do in the time of the great plague of London; and when he had opened the doors, he used to run over to the other side of the way.

"Ah, Mr. Blunt!" he used to say to the bookseller, who lived opposite — "Ah! Mr. Blunt, I is obligated to cut over here, leastways till the *atymouspheric* air is mixed up all along with the *stinkifications* which come from the church."

By this it will be seen that the beadle was rather a learned man, and no doubt went to some mechanics' institution of those days, where he learned something of everything but what was calculated to be of some service to him. As might be supposed, from the fact that this sort of thing had gone on for a few months, it began to excite some attention with a view to a remedy; for, in the great city of London, a nuisance of any sort or description requires to become venerable by age before any one thinks of removing it; and after that, it is quite clear that that becomes a good argument against removing it at all. But at last, the churchwardens began to have a fear that some pestilential disease would be the result if they for any longer period of time put up with the horrible stench, and that they might be among its first victims, so they began to ask each other what could be done to obviate it. Probably, if this frightful stench, being suggestive, as it was, of all sorts of horrors, had been graciously pleased to confine itself to some poor locality, nothing would have been heard of it; but when it became actually offensive to a gentleman in a metropolitan pulpit, and when it began to make itself perceptible to the sleepy faculties of the

churchwardens of St. Dunstan's church, Fleet Street, so as to prevent them even from dozing through the afternoon sermon, it became a very serious matter indeed. But what was it, what could it be, and what was to be done to get rid of it? These were the anxious questions that were asked right and left, as regarded the serious nuisance, without the fates graciously acceding any reply. But yet one thing seemed to be generally agreed, and that was, that it did come, and must come, somehow or other, out of the vaults from beneath the church. But then, as the pious and hypocritical Mr. Butterwick, who lived opposite, said —

"How could that be, when it was satisfactorily proved by the present books that nobody had been buried in the vaults for some time, and therefore it was a very odd thing that dead people, after leaving off smelling and being disagreeable, should all of a sudden burst out again in that line, and be twice as bad as ever they were at first."

And on Wednesdays sometimes, too, when pious people were not satisfied with the Sunday's devotion, but began again in the middle of the week, that stench was positively terrific. Indeed, so bad was it, that some of the congregation were forced to leave, and have been seen to slink into Bell Yard, where Lovett's pie shop was situated, and then and there solace themselves with a pork or a veal pie, in order that their mouths and noses should be full of a delightful and agreeable flavour, instead of one most peculiarly and decidedly the reverse. At last there was a confirmation to be held at St. Dunstan's church, and a great concourse of persons assembled, for a sermon was to be preached by the bishop after the confirmation; and a very great fuss indeed was to be made about really nobody knew exactly what. Preparations, as newspapers say, upon an extensive scale, and regardless of expense, were made for the purpose of adding lustre to the ceremony, and surprising the bishop, when he came, with a good idea that the people who attended St. Dunstan's church were somebodies, and really worth confirming. The confirmation was to take place at twelve o'clock, and the bells ushered in the morning with their most pious tones, for it was not every day that the authorities of St. Dunstan succeeded in catching a bishop, and when they did so, they were determined to make the most of him. And the numerous authorities, including churchwardens, and even the very beadle, were in an uncommon fluster, and running about, and impeding each other, as authorities always do upon public occasions. But, to those who only look to the surface of things, and who came to admire what was grand and magnificent in the preparations, the beadle certainly carried away the palm, for that functionary was attired in a completely new cocked hat and coat, and certainly looked very splendid and showy upon the occasion. Moreover, that beadle had been well and judiciously selected, and the parish authorities made no secret of it, when there was an election for beadle, that they threw all their influence into the scale of that candidate who happened to be the biggest, and consequently, who was calculated to wear the official costume with an air that no smaller man could have possibly aspired to on any account. At half past eleven o'clock the bishop made his gracious appearance, and was duly ushered into the vestry, where there was a comfortable fire, and on the table in which, likewise, were certain cold chickens and bottles of rare wines; for confirming a number of people, and preaching a sermon besides, was

considered no joke, and might, for all they knew, be provocative of a great appetite in the bishop. And with what a bland and courtly air the bishop smiled as he ascended the steps of St. Dunstan's Church. How affable he was to the churchwardens, and he actually smiled upon a poor miserable charity boy, who, his eyes glaring wide open, and his muffin cap in his hand, was taking his first stare at a real live bishop. To be sure, the beadle knocked him down directly the bishop had passed, for having the presumption to look at such a great personage, but then that was to be expected fully and completely, and only proved that the proverb, which permits a cat to look at a king, is not equally applicable to charity boys and bishops. When the bishop got to the vestry, some very complimentary words were uttered to him by the usual officiating clergyman, but, somehow or other, the bland smile had left the lips of the great personage, and, interrupting the vicar in the midst of a fine flowing speech, he said —

"That's all very well, but what a terrible stink there is here!"

The churchwardens gave a groan, for they had flattered themselves that perhaps the bishop would not notice the dreadful smell, or that, if he did, he would think it was accidental, and say nothing about it; but now, when he really did mention it, they found all their hopes scattered to the winds, and that it was necessary to say something.

"Is this horrid charnel house sort of smell always here?"

"I am afraid it is," said one of the churchwardens.

"Afraid!" said the bishop, "Surely you know; you seem to me to have a nose."

"Yes," said the churchwarden, in great confusion, "I have that honour, and I have the pleasure of informing you, my Lord Bishop — I mean I have the honour of informing you that this smell is always here."

The bishop sniffed several times, and then he said —

"It is very dreadful; and I hope that by the next time I come to St. Dunstan's, you will have the pleasure and the honour, both, of informing me that it has gone away."

The churchwarden bowed, and got into an extreme corner, saying to himself —

"This is the bishop's last visit here, and I don't wonder at it, for, as if out of pure spite, the smell is ten times worse than ever today."

And so it was, for it seemed to come up through all the crevices of the flooring of the church, with a power and perseverance that was positively dreadful.

The people coughed, and held their handkerchiefs to their noses, remarking to each other —

"Isn't it dreadful? — did you ever know the smell in St. Dunstan's so bad before," and everybody agreed that they never had known it anything like so bad, for that it was positively awful — and so indeed it was.

The anxiety of the bishop to get away was quite manifest, and, if he could have decently taken his departure without confirming anybody at all, there is no doubt but that he would have willingly done so, and left all the congregation to die and be — something or another. But this he could not do, but he could cut it short, and he did so. The people found themselves confirmed before they almost knew where they were, and the bishop would not go into the vestry again on any account, but hurried down the steps of the church, and into his carriage, with the greatest precipitation in the world, thus proving that holiness is no proof against a most abominable stench. As may be well supposed, after this, the subject assumed a much more serious aspect, and on the following day a solemn meeting was held of all the church authorities, at which it was determined that men should be employed to make a thorough and searching examination of the vaults of St. Dunstan's, with the view of discovering, if possible, from whence particularly the abominable stench emanated. And then it was decided that the stench was to be put down, and that the bishop was to be apprised it was put down, and that he might visit the church in perfect safety.

CHAPTER XX
Sweeney Todd's Proceedings Consequent upon the Departure of Tobias

We left the barber in his own shop, much wondering that Tobias had not responded to the call which he had made upon him, but yet scarcely believing it possible that he could have ventured upon the height of iniquity, which we know Tobias had really been guilty of. He paused for a few moments, and held up the light which he had procured, and gazed around him with inquiring eyes, for he could, indeed, scarcely believe it possible that Tobias had sufficiently cast off his dread of him, Sweeney Todd, to be enabled to achieve any act for his liberation. But when he saw that the lock of the parlour door was open, positive rage obtained precedence over every other feeling.

"The villain!" he cried, "Has he dared really to consummate an act I thought he could not have dreamt of for a moment? Is it possible that he can have presumed so far as to have searched the house?"

That Tobias, however, had presumed so far, the barber soon discovered, and when he went into his parlour and saw what had actually occurred, and that not only was every cupboard door broken open, but that likewise the door which led to the staircase and the upper part of the house had not escaped, he got perfectly furious, and it was some time before he could sufficiently calm himself to reflect upon the probable and possible amount of danger he might run in consequence of these proceedings. When he did, his active mind at once told him that there was not much to be dreaded immediately, for that most probably Tobias, still having the fear before his eyes of what he might do as regarded his mother, had actually run away; and, "in all likelihood," muttered the barber, "he has taken with him something which would allow me to fix upon him the stigma of robbery, but that I must see to."

Having fastened the shop door securely, he took the light in his hands, and ascended to the upper part of his house — that is to say, the first floor, where alone anything was to be found. He saw at once the open bureau, with all its glittering display of jewels, and as he gazed upon the heap, he muttered —

"I have not so accurate a knowledge of what is here as to be able to say if anything be extracted or not, but I know the amount of money, if I do not know the precise number of jewels which this bureau contains."

He opened a small drawer which had entirely escaped the scrutiny of Tobias, and proceeded to count a large number of guineas which were there.

"These are correct," he said, when he had finished his examination — "these are correct, and he has touched none of them."

He then opened another drawer, in which were a great many packets of silver done up in paper, and these likewise he carefully counted, and was satisfied they were right.

"It is strange," he said, "that he has taken nothing, but yet perhaps it is better that it should be so, inasmuch as it shows a wholesome fear of me. The slightest examination would have shown him these hoards of money; and since he has not made that slight examination, nor discovered any of them, it seems to my mind decisive upon the subject, that he has taken nothing, and perchance I shall discover him easier than I imagine."

He repaired to the parlour again, and carefully divested himself of everything which had enabled him so successfully to impose upon John Mundel, and replaced them by his ordinary costume, after which he fastened up his house and sallied forth, taking his way direct to Mrs. Ragg's humble home, in the expectation that there he would hear something of Tobias, which would give him a clue where to search for him, for search for him he fully intended; but what were his precise intentions perhaps he could hardly have told himself, until he actually found him. When he reached Mrs. Ragg's house, and made his appearance abruptly before that lady, who seemed somehow or another to be always ironing and always to drop the iron when any one came in, very near their toes, he said —

"Where did your son Tobias go after he left you tonight?"

"Lor'! Mr. Todd, is it you? You are as good as a conjuror, sir, for he was here; but bless you, sir, I know no more where he is gone to, than the man in the moon. He said he was going to sea, but I am sure I should not have thought it, that I should not."

"To sea! — Then the probability is that he would go down to the docks, but surely not tonight. Do you not expect him back here to sleep?"

"Well, sir, that's a very good thought of yours; and he may come back here to sleep, for all I know to the contrary."

"But you do not know it for a fact?"

"He didn't say so; but he may come, you know, sir, for all that."

"Did he tell you his reason for leaving me?"

"Indeed no, sir; he really did not, and he seemed to me to be a little bit out of his senses."

"Ah! Mrs. Ragg," said Sweeney Todd, "there you have it. From the first moment that he came into my service, I knew and felt confident that he was out of his senses. There was a strangeness of behaviour about him, which soon convinced me of that fact, and I am only anxious about him, in order that some effort may be made to cure him of such a malady, for it is a serious, and a dreadful one, and one which, unless taken in time, will be yet the death of Tobias."

These words were spoken with such solemn seriousness, that they had a wonderful effect upon Mrs. Ragg, who, like most ignorant persons, began immediately to confirm that which she most dreaded.

"Oh, it's too true," she said, "it's too true. He did say some extraordinary things tonight, Mr. Todd, and he said he had something to tell, which was too horrid to speak of. Now the idea, you know, Mr. Todd, of anybody having anything at all to tell, and not telling it at once, is quite singular."

"It is! — And I am sure that his conduct is such you never would be guilty of, Mrs. Ragg; — but hark! What's that?"

"It's a knock, Mr. Todd."

"Hush, stop a moment — what if it be Tobias?"

"Gracious goodness! It can't be him, for he would have come in at once."

"No; I slipped the bolt of the door, because I wished to talk to you without observation; so it may be Tobias, you perceive, after all. But let me hide somewhere, so that I may hear what he says, and be able to judge how his mind is affected. I will not hesitate to do something for him, let it cost what it may."

"There's the cupboard, Mr. Todd. To be sure there is some dirty saucepans and a frying pan in it, and of course it ain't a fit place to ask you to go into."

"Never mind that — never mind that; only you be careful, for the sake of Tobias's very life, to keep secret that I am here."

The knocking at the door increased each moment in vehemence, and scarcely had Sweeney Todd succeeded in getting into the cupboard along with Mrs. Ragg's pots and pans, and thoroughly concealed himself, when she opened the door; and, sure enough — Tobias, heated, tired, and looking ghastly pale — staggered into the room.

"Mother," he said, "I have taken a new thought, and have come back to you."

"Well, I thought you would, Tobias; and a very good thing it is that you have."

"Listen to me: I thought of flying from England for ever, and of never again setting foot upon its shores. I have altered that determination completely, and I feel now that it is my duty to do something else."

"To do what, Tobias?"

"To tell all I know — to make a clean breast, mother, and, let the consequences be what they may, to let justice take its course."

"What do you mean, Tobias?"

"Mother, I have come to a conclusion, that what I have to tell is of such vast importance, compared with any consequences that may arise from the petty robbery of the candlestick, which you know of, that I ought not to hesitate a moment in revealing everything."

"But, my dear Tobias, remember that that is a dreadful secret, and one that must be kept."

"It cannot matter — it cannot matter; and, besides, it is more than probable that by revealing what I actually know, and which is of such great magnitude, I may, mother, in a manner of speaking, perchance completely exonerate you from the consequences of that transaction. Besides, it was long ago, and the prosecutor may have mercy; but, be all that how it may, and be the consequences what they may, I must and will tell what I now know."

"But what is it Tobias, that you know?"

"Something too dreadful for me to utter to you alone. Go into the Temple, mother, to some of the chambers you attend to, and ask them to come to me, and listen to what I have got to say. They will be amply repaid for their trouble, for they will hear that which may, perhaps, save their own lives."

"He is quite gone," thought Mrs. Ragg, "and Mr. Todd is correct; poor Tobias is as mad as he can be!"

"Alas, alas, Tobias, why don't you try to reason yourself into a better state of mind! You don't know a bit what you are saying, any more than the man in the moon."

"I know I am half mad, mother, but yet I know what I am saying well; so do not fancy that it is not to be relied upon, but go and fetch some one at once to listen to what I have to relate."

"Perhaps," thought Mrs. Ragg, "if I were to pretend to humour him, it would be as well, and, while I am gone, Mr. Todd can speak to him."

This was a bright idea of Mrs. Ragg's, and she forthwith proceeded to carry it into execution, saying —

"Well, my dear, if it must be, it must be — and I will go; but I hope while I have gone, somebody will speak to you, and convince you that you ought to try to quiet yourself."

These words Mrs. Ragg uttered aloud, for the special benefit of Sweeney Todd, who, she considered, would have been there to take the hint accordingly. It is needless to say he did hear them, and how far he profited by them, we shall quickly perceive. As for poor Tobias, he had not the remotest idea of the close

proximity of his arch enemy; if he had, he would quickly have left that spot, where he might well to conjecture so much danger awaited him; for although Sweeney Todd, under the circumstances, probably felt that he dared not take Tobias's life, still he might exchange something that could place it in his power to do so shortly, with the least personal danger to himself. The door closed after the retreating form of Mrs. Ragg, and as, considering the mission she was gone upon, it was very clear some minutes must elapse before she could return, Sweeney Todd did not feel that there was any very particular hurry in the transaction.

"What shall I do?" he said to himself. "Shall I await his mother's coming again, and get her to aid me, or shall I of myself adopt some means which will put an end to trouble on this boy's account?"

Sweeney Todd was a man tolerably rapid in thought, and he contrived to make up his mind that the best plan, unquestionably, would be to lay hold of Tobias at once, and so prevent the possibility of any appeal to his mother becoming effective. Tobias, when his mother left the place, as he imagined, for the purpose of procuring some one to listen to what he considered to be Sweeney Todd's delinquencies, rested his face upon his hands, and gave himself up to painful and deep thought. He felt that he had arrived at quite a crisis in his history, and that the next few hours could not surely but be very important to him in their results; and so they were indeed, but not certainly exactly in the way that he all along anticipated, for he thought of nothing but of the arrest and discomfiture of Todd, little expecting how close was his proximity to that formidable personage.

"Surely," thought Tobias, "I shall, by disclosing all that I know about Todd, gain some consideration for my mother, and after all, she may not be prosecuted for the robbery of the candlestick, for how very trifling is that affair compared to the much more dreadful things which I more than suspect Sweeney Todd to be guilty of. He is and must be, from all that I have seen and heard, a murderer, although how he disposes of his victims is involved in the most complete mystery, and is to me a matter past all human power of comprehension. I have no idea even upon that subject whatever."

This, indeed, was a great mystery; for, even admitting that Sweeney Todd was a murderer, and it must be allowed that as yet we have only circumstantial evidence of that fact, we can form no conclusion from such evidence as to how he perpetrated the deed, or how afterwards he disposed of the body of his victim. This grand and principal difficulty in the way of committing murder with impunity, namely, the disposal of a corpse, certainly did not seem at all to have any effect upon Sweeney Todd; for if he made corpses, he had some means of getting rid of them with the most wonderful expedition as well as secrecy.

"He is a murderer," thought Tobias. "I know he is, although I have never seen him do the deed, or seen any appearances in the shop of a deed of blood having been committed. Yet why is it that occasionally, when a better dressed person

than usual comes into the shop, that he sends me out on some errand to a distant part of the town?"

Tobias did not forget, too, that on more than one occasion he had come back quicker than he had been expected, and that he had caught Sweeney Todd in some little confusion, and seen the hat, the stick, or perhaps the umbrella of the last customer quietly waiting there, although the customer had gone; and even if the glaring improbability of a man leaving his hat behind him in a barber's shop was got over, why did he not come back for it? This was a circumstance which was entitled to all the weight which Tobias, during his mental cogitations, could give to it, and there could be but one possible explanation of a man not coming back for his hat, and that was that he had not the power to do so.

"This house will be searched," thought Tobias, "and all those things, which of course must have belonged to so many different people, will be found, and then they will be identified, and he will be required to say how he came by them, which, I think, will be a difficult task indeed for Sweeney Todd to accomplish. What a relief it will be to me, to be sure, when he is hanged, as I think he is tolerably sure to be!"

"What a relief," muttered Sweeney Todd, as he slowly opened the door, unseen by Tobias — "what a relief it will be to me when this boy is in his grave, as he will be soon, or else I have forgotten all my moral learning, and turned chicken-hearted — neither of them very likely circumstances."

CHAPTER XXI
The Misadventure of Tobias — The Madhouse on Peckham Rye

Sweeney Todd paused for a moment at the cupboard door, before he made up his mind as to whether he should pounce upon poor Tobias at once, or adopt a more creeping, cautious mode of operation. The latter course was by far the most congenial to his mind, and so he adopted it in a moment or so, and stole quietly from his place of concealment, and with so little noise, that Tobias could not have the least suspicion that any one was in the room but himself. Treading, as if each step might involve some serious consequences, he thus at length got completely behind the chair on which Tobias was sitting, and stood with folded arms, and such a hideous smile upon his face, that they together formed no inapt representation of the Mephistopheles of the German drama.

"I shall at length," murmured Tobias, "be free from my present dreadful state of mind, by thus accusing Todd. He is a murderer — of that I have no doubt: it is but a duty of mine to stand forward as his accuser."

Sweeney Todd stretched out his two brawny hands, and clutched Tobias by the head, which he turned round till the boy could see him, and then he said —

"Indeed, Tobias; and did it never strike you that Todd was not so easily to be overcome as you would wish him, eh, Tobias?"

The shock of this astonishing and sudden appearance of Sweeney Todd was so great, that for a few moments Tobias was deprived of all power of speech or action, and with his head so strangely twisted as to seem to threaten the destruction of his neck. He glared in the triumphant and malignant countenance of his persecutor, as he would into that of the arch enemy of all mankind, which probably he now began to think the barber really was. If one thing more than another was calculated to delight such a man as Todd, it certainly was to perceive what a dreadful effect his presence had upon Tobias, who remained for about a minute and a half in this state before he ventured upon uttering a shriek, which, however, when it did come, almost frightened Todd himself. It was one of those cries which can only come from a heart in its utmost agony — a cry which might have heralded the spirit to another world, and proclaimed, as it very nearly did the destruction of the intellect for ever. The barber staggered back a pace or two as he heard it, for it was too terrific even for him, but it was for a very brief period that it had that stunning effect upon him, and then, with a full consciousness of the danger to which it subjected him, he sprang upon poor Tobias as a tiger might be supposed to do upon a lamb, and clutched him by the throat, exclaiming —

"Such another cry, and it is the last you ever live to utter, although it cover me with difficulties to escape the charge of killing you. Peace! I say, peace!"

This exhortation was quite needless, for Tobias could not have uttered a word, had he been ever so much inclined to do so; the barber held his throat with such an iron clutch, as if it had been in a vice.

"Villain," growled Todd, "villain; so this is the way in which you have dared to disregard my injunctions. But no matter, no matter! — You shall have plenty of leisure to reflect upon what you have done for yourself. Fool! To think that you could cope with me — Sweeney Todd! Ha! Ha!"

He burst into a laugh, so much more hideous, than his ordinary efforts in that way, that, had Tobias heard it — which he did not, for his head had dropped upon his breast, and he had become insensible — it would have terrified him almost as much as Sweeney Todd's sudden appearance had done.

"So," muttered the barber, "he has fainted, has he? Dull child, that is all the better. For once in a way, Tobias, I will carry you — not to oblige you, but to oblige myself. By all that's damnable, it was a lively thought that brought me here tonight, or else I might, by the dawn of the morning, have had some very troublesome inquiries made of me."

He took Tobias up as easily as if he had been an infant, and strode from the chambers with him, leaving Mrs. Ragg to draw whatever inference she chose from his absence; but feeling convinced that she was too much under his control, to take any steps of a nature to give him the smallest amount of uneasiness.

"The woman," he muttered to himself, "is a double distilled ass, and can be made to believe anything, so that I have no fear whatever of her. I dare not kill Tobias, because it is necessary, in case of the matter being at any other period mentioned, that his mother shall be in a position to swear that she saw him after this night alive and well."

The barber strode through the Temple, carrying the boy, who seemed not at all in a hurry to recover from the nervous and partial state of suffocation into which he had fallen. As they passed through the gate opening into Fleet Street, the porter, who knew the barber well by sight, said —

"Hilloa, Mr. Todd, is that you? Why, who are you carrying?"

"Yes, it's I," said Todd, "and I am carrying my apprentice boy, Tobias Ragg, poor fellow."

"Poor fellow! — Why, what's the matter with him?"

"I can hardly tell you, but he seems to me and to his mother to have gone out of his senses. Good night to you, good night. I'm looking for a coach."

"Good night, Mr. Todd; I don't think you'll get one nearer than the market — what a kind thing now of him to carry the boy! It ain't every master would do

that; but we must not judge of people by their looks, and even Sweeney Todd, though he has a face that one would not like to meet in a lonely place on a dark night, may be a kindhearted man."

Sweeney Todd walked rapidly down Fleet Street, towards old Fleet Market, which was then in all its glory, if that could be called glory which consisted in all sorts of filth, enough to produce a pestilence within the city of London. When there, he addressed a large bundle of great coats, in the middle of which was supposed to be a hackney coachman of the regular old school, and who was lounging over his vehicle, which was as long and lumbering as a city barge.

"Jarvey," he said, "what will you take me to Peckham Rye for?"

"Peckham Rye — you and the boy — there ain't any more of you waiting round the corner, are there — 'cos, you know, that won't be fair?"

"No, no, no."

"Well, don't be in a passion, master. I only asked, you know, so you need not be put out about it; I will take you for twelve shillings, and that's what I call remarkably cheap, all things considered."

"I'll give half the amount," said Sweeney Todd, "and you may consider yourself well paid."

"Half, master? — That is cutting it low; but, howsomedever, I suppose I must put up with it, and take you. Get in, I must try and make it up by some better fare out of somebody else."

The barber paid no heed to these renewed remonstrances of the coachman, but got into the vehicle, carrying Tobias with him, apparently with great care and consideration; but when the coach door closed, and no one was observing him, he flung him down among the straw that was at the bottom of the vehicle, and resting his immense feet upon him, he gave one of his disagreeable laughs, as he said —

"Well, I think I have you now, Master Tobias; your troubles will soon be over. I am really very much afraid that you will die suddenly, and then there will be an end of you altogether, which will be a very sad thing, though I don't think I shall go into mourning, because I have an opinion that that only keeps alive the bitterness of regret, and that it's a great deal better done without, Master Tobias."

The hackney coach swung about from side to side, in the proper approved manner of hackney coaches in the olden time, when they used to be called "bone setters," and to be thought wonderful if they made a progress of three miles and a half an hour. This was the sort of vehicle, then, in which poor Tobias, still perfectly insensible, was rumbled over Blackfriars Bridge, and so on towards Peckham, which Sweeney Todd had announced to be his place of destination.

The Barber Carries off Tobias to a Private Madhouse.

Going at the rate they did, it was nearly two hours before they arrived upon Peckham Rye; and any one acquainted with that locality is well aware that there are two roads, the one to the left, and the other to the right, both of which are pleasantly enough studded with villa residences. Sweeney Todd directed the coachman to take the road to the left, which he accordingly did, and they pursued it for a distance of about a mile and a half. It must not be supposed that this pleasant district of country was then in the state it is now, as regards inhabitants or cultivation. On the contrary, it was rather a wild spot, on which now and then a serious robbery had been committed; and which had witnessed some of the exploits of those highwaymen, whose adventures, in the present day, if one may judge from the public patronage they may receive, are viewed with such a great amount of interest. There was a lonely, large, rambling, old looking house by the way side, on the left. A high wall surrounded it, which only allowed the topmost portion of it to be visible, and that presented great symptoms of decay, in the dilapidated character of the chimney pot, and the general appearance of discomfort which pervaded it. There Sweeney Todd directed the coachman to stop, and when the vehicle, after swinging to and fro for several minutes, did indeed at last resolve itself into a state of repose, Sweeney Todd got out himself, and rang a bell, the handle of which hung invitingly at the gate. He had to wait several minutes before an answer was given to this summons, but at length a noise proceeded from within, as if several bars and bolts were being withdrawn; and presently the door was opened, and a huge, rough looking man made his appearance on the threshold.

“Well! what is it now?” he cried.

“I have a patient for Mr. Fogg,” said Sweeney Todd. “I want to see him immediately.”

“Oh! Well, the more the merrier: it don’t matter to me a bit. Have you got him with you — and is he tolerably quiet?”

"It's a mere boy, and he is not violently mad, but very decidedly so as regards what he says."

"Oh! That's it, is it? He can say what he likes here, it can make no difference in the world to us. Bring him in — Mr. Fogg is in his own room."

"I know the way: you take charge of the lad, and I will go and speak to Mr. Fogg about him. But stay, give the coachman these six shillings, and discharge him."

The doorkeeper of the lunatic asylum, for such it was, went out to obey the injunctions of Sweeney Todd, while that rascally individual himself walked along a wide passage to a door which was at the further extremity of it.

CHAPTER XXII
The Madhouse Cell

When the porter of the madhouse went out to the coach, his first impression was, that the boy, who was said to be insane, was dead — for not even the jolting ride to Peckham had been sufficient to arouse him to a consciousness of how he was situated; and there he lay still at the bottom of the coach alike insensible to joy or sorrow.

"Is he dead?" said the man to the coachman.

"How should I know?" was the reply; "he may be or he may not, but I want to know how long I am to wait here for my fare?"

"There is your money, be off with you. I can see now that the boy is all right, for he breathes, although it's after an odd fashion that he does so. I should rather think he has had a knock on the head, or something of that kind."

As he spoke, he conveyed Tobias within the building, and the coachman, since he had got his six shillings, feeling that he had no further interest in the matter, drove away at once, and paid no more attention to it whatever. When Sweeney Todd reached the door at the end of the passage, he tapped at it with his knuckles, and a voice cried —

"Who knocks — who knocks? Curses on you all! Who knocks?"

Sweeney Todd did not make any verbal reply to this polite request, but opening the door he walked into the apartment, which is one that really deserves some description. It was a large room with a vaulted roof, and in the centre was a superior oaken table, at which sat a man considerably advanced in years, as was proclaimed by his grizzled locks that graced the sides of his head, but whose herculean frame and robust constitution had otherwise successfully resisted the assaults of time. A lamp swung from the ceiling, which had a shade over the top of it, so that it cast a tolerably bright glow upon the table below, which was covered with books and papers, as well as glasses and bottles of different kinds, which showed that the madhouse keeper was, at all events, as far as himself was concerned, not at all indifferent to personal comfort. The walls, however, presented the most curious aspect, for they were hung with a variety of tools and implements, which would have puzzled any one not initiated into the matter even to guess at their uses. These were, however, in point of fact, specimens of the different kinds of machinery which were used for the purpose of coercing the unhappy persons whose evil destiny made them members of that establishment. Those were what is "called the good old times," when all sorts of abuses flourished in perfection, and when the unhappy insane were actually punished as if they were guilty of some great offence. Yes, and worse than that were they punished, for a criminal who might have injustice done to him by any who were in authority over him, could complain, and if he got hold of a person of higher power, his complaints might be listened to, but

no one heeded what was said by the poor maniac, whose bitterest accusations of his keepers, let their conduct be what it might, was only listened to and set down as a further proof of his mental disorder. This was indeed a most awful and sad state of things, and, to the disgrace of this country, it is a social evil allowed until very late years to continue in full force. Mr. Fogg, the madhouse keeper fixed his keen eyes from beneath his shaggy brows, upon Sweeney Todd, as the latter entered his apartment, and then he said —

"Mr. Todd, I think, unless my memory deceives me."

"The same," said the barber, making a hideous face, "I believe I am not easily forgotten."

"True," said Mr. Fogg, as he reached a book, the edge of which was cut into a lot of little slips, on each of which was a capital letter, in the order of the alphabet — "true, you are not easily forgotten, Mr. Todd."

He then opened the book at the letter T, and read from it: —

"Mr. Sweeney Todd, Fleet Street, London, paid one year's keep and burial of Thomas Simkins, aged 15, found dead in his bed, after a residence in the asylum of 10 months and 4 days. I think, Mr. Todd, that was our last little transaction; what can I do now for you, sir?"

"I am rather unfortunate," said Todd, "with my boys. I have got another here, who has shown such decided symptoms of insanity, that it becomes absolutely necessary to place him under your care."

"Indeed! — Does he rave?"

"Why, yes he does, and it's the most absurd nonsense in the world that he raves about; for, to hear him, one would really think that, instead of being one of the most humane of men, I was, in point of fact, an absolute murderer."

"A murderer, Mr. Todd!"

"Yes, a murderer — a murderer to all intents and purposes; could anything be more absurd than such an accusation? — I, that have the milk of human kindness flowing in every vein, and whose very appearance ought to be sufficient to convince anybody at once of my kindness of disposition."

Sweeney Todd finished his speech by making such a hideous face, that the madhouse keeper could not for the life of him tell what to say to it; and then there came one of those short, disagreeable laughs which Todd would at times utter, which, somehow or other, never appeared exactly to come from his mouth, but always made people look up at the walls and ceiling of the apartment in which they were, in great doubt as to whence the remarkable sound came.

“For how long,” said the madhouse keeper, “do you think this malady will continue?”

“I will pay,” said Sweeney Todd, as he leaned over the table, and looked in the face of his questioner, “I will pay for twelve months; but I don’t think between you and I, that the case will last anything like so long — I think he will die suddenly.”

“I shouldn’t wonder if he did. Some of our patients do die very suddenly, and, somehow or other, we never know exactly how it happens; but it must be some sort of fit, for they are found dead in the morning in their beds, and then we bury them privately and quietly, without troubling anybody about it at all, which is decidedly the best way, because it saves a great annoyance to friends and relations, as well as prevents any extra expense which otherwise might be foolishly gone to.”

“You are wonderfully correct and considerate,” said Todd, “and it’s no more than what I expected from you, or what any one might expect from a person of your great experience, knowledge, and acquirements. I must confess I am quite delighted to hear you talk in so elevated a strain.”

“Why,” said Mr. Fogg, with a strange leer upon his face, “we are forced to make ourselves useful, like the rest of the community; and we could not expect people to send their mad friends and relatives here, unless we took good care that their ends and views were answered by so doing. We make no remarks, and we ask no questions. Those are the principles upon which we have conducted business so successfully and so long; those are the principles upon which we shall continue to conduct it, and to merit, we hope, the patronage of the British public.”

“Unquestionably — most unquestionably.”

“You may as well introduce me to your patient at once, Mr. Todd, for I suppose, by this time, he has been brought into this house.”

“Certainly, certainly — I shall have great pleasure in showing him to you.”

The madhouse keeper rose, and so did Mr. Todd, and the former, pointing to the bottles and glasses on the table, said —

“When this business is settled, we can have a friendly glass together.”

To this proposition Sweeney Todd assented with a nod, and then they both proceeded to what was called a reception room in the asylum, and where poor Tobias had been conveyed and laid upon a table, when he showed slight symptoms of recovering from the state of insensibility into which he had fallen, and a man was sluicing water on his face by the assistance of a hearth broom occasionally dipped into a pailful of that fluid.

"Quite young," said the madhouse keeper, as he looked upon the pale and interesting face of Tobias.

"Yes," said Sweeney Todd, "he is young — more's the pity — and, of course, we deeply regret his present situation."

"Oh, of course, of course; but see, he opens his eyes, and will speak directly."

"Rave, you mean, rave!" said Todd; "Don't call it speaking, it is not entitled to the name. Hush! Listen to him."

"Where am I?" said Tobias, "Where am I? Todd is a murderer — I denounce him."

"You hear — you hear?" said Todd.

"Mad indeed," said the keeper.

"Oh, save me from him — save me from him!" said Tobias, fixing his eyes upon Mr. Fogg. "Save me from him; it is my life he seeks because I know his secrets. He is a murderer — and many a person comes into his shop, who never leaves it again in life, if at all."

"You hear him?" said Todd. "Was there ever anybody so mad?"

"Desperately mad," said the keeper. "Come, come, young fellow, we shall be under the necessity of putting you in a strait waistcoat if you go on in that way. We must do it, for there is no help in such cases if we don't."

Todd slunk back into the dark of the apartment, so that he was not seen, and Tobias continued, in an imploring tone —

"I do not know who you are, sir, or where I am; but let me beg of you to cause the house of Sweeney Todd, the barber, in Fleet Street, near St. Dunstan's church, to be searched, and you will find that he is a murderer. There are at least a hundred hats, quantities of walking sticks, umbrellas, watches, and rings, all belonging to unfortunate persons who, from time to time, have met with their deaths through him."

"How uncommonly mad!" said Mr. Fogg.

"No, no," said Tobias, "I am not mad. Why call me mad, when the truth or falsehood of what I say can be ascertained so easily? Search his house, and if those things be not found there, say that I am mad, and have but dreamed of them. I do not know how he kills the people. That is a great mystery to me yet; but that he does kill them, I have no doubt — I cannot have a doubt."

"Watson!" cried the madhouse keeper. "Hilloa! Here, Watson."

“I am here, sir,” said the man, who had been dashing water upon poor Tobias’s face.

“You will take this lad, Watson, as he seems extremely feverish and unsettled. You will take him and shave his head, Watson, and put a strait waistcoat upon him, and let him be put in one of the dark, damp cells. We must be careful of him, and too much light encourages delirium and fever.”

“Oh! no, no!” cried Tobias; “What have I done that I should be subjected to such cruel treatment? what have I done that I should be placed in a cell? If this be a madhouse, I am not mad. Oh! Have mercy upon me! — Have mercy upon me!”

“You will give him nothing but bread and water, Watson; and the first symptom of his recovery, which will produce better treatment, will be his exonerating his master from what he has said about him; for he must be mad so long as he continues to accuse such a gentleman as Mr. Todd of such things; nobody but a mad man or a mad boy would think of it.”

“Then,” said Tobias, “I shall continue mad; for if it be madness to know and aver that Sweeney Todd, the barber, of Fleet Street, is a murderer, mad am I, for I know it, and aver it. It is true — it is true.”

“Take him away, Watson, and do as I desired you. I begin to find that the boy is a very dangerous character, and more viciously mad than anybody we have had here for a considerable time.”

Tobias in the Hands of the Madhouse Keepers.

The man named Watson seized upon Tobias, who again uttered a shriek something similar to the one which had come from his lips when Sweeney Todd clutched hold of him in his mother’s room. But they were used to such things in that madhouse, and cared little for them, so no one heeded the cry in the

least; but poor Tobias was carried to the door half maddened in reality by the horrors that surrounded him. Just as he was being conveyed out, Sweeney Todd stepped up to him, and putting his mouth close to his ear, he whispered —

"Ha! Ha! Tobias! How do you feel now? Do you think Sweeney Todd will be hung, or will you die in the cell of a madhouse?"

CHAPTER XXIII
The New Cook to Mrs. Lovett gets tired of his Situation

From what we have already had occasion to record about Mrs. Lovett's new cook, who ate so voraciously in the cellar, our readers will no doubt be induced to believe that he was a gentleman likely enough soon to be tired of his situation. To a starving man, and one who seemed completely abandoned even by hope, Lovett's bakehouse, with an unlimited leave to eat as much as possible, must of course present itself in the most desirable and lively colours: and no wonder therefore, that, banishing all scruple, a man so placed, would take the situation, with very little inquiry. But people will tire of good things; and it is a remarkable well authenticated fact that human nature is prone to be discontented. And those persons who are well acquainted with the human mind, and who know well how little value people set upon things which they possess, while those which they are pursuing, and which seem to be beyond their reach, assume the liveliest colours imaginable, adopt various means of turning this to account. Napoleon took good care that the meanest of his soldiers should see in perspective the possibility of grasping a marshal's baton. Confectioners at the present day, when they take a new apprentice, tell him to eat as much as he likes of those tempting tarts and sweetmeats, one or two of which before had been a most delicious treat. The soldier goes on fighting away, and never gets the marshal's baton. The confectioner's boy crams himself with Banbury cakes, gets dreadfully sick, and never touches one afterwards. And now, to revert to our friend in Mrs. Lovett's bakehouse. At first everything was delightful, and, by the aid of the machinery, he found that it was no difficult matter to keep up the supply of pies by really a very small amount of manual labour. And that labour also was such a labour of love, for the pies were delicious; there could be no mistake about that. He tasted them half cooked, he tasted them wholly, and he tasted them overdone; hot and cold; pork and veal with seasoning, and without seasoning, until at last he had had them in every possible way and shape; and when the fourth day came after his arrival in the cellar, he might have been sitting in rather a contemplative attitude with a pie before him. It was twelve o'clock: he had heard that sound come from the shop. Yes, it was twelve o'clock, and he had eaten nothing yet; but he kept his eye fixed upon the pie that lay untouched before him.

"The pies are all very well," he said; "in fact, of course they are capital pies; and now that I see how they are made, and know that there is nothing wrong in them, I, of course, relish them more than ever; but one can't always live upon pies; it's quite impossible one can subsist upon pies from one end of the year to the other, if they were the finest pies the world ever saw, or ever will see. I don't say anything against the pies — I know they are made of the finest flour, the best possible butter, and that the meat, which comes from God knows where, is the most delicate looking and tender I ever ate in all my life."

He stretched out his hand and broke a small portion of the crust from the pie that was before him, and he tried to eat it. He certainly did succeed; but it was a great effort; and when he had done, he shook his head, saying —

"No, no! — Damn it! I cannot eat it, and that's the fact — one cannot be continually eating pies: it is out of the question, quite out the question; and all I have to remark is — damn the pies! I really don't think I shall be able to let another one pass my lips."

He rose and paced with rapid strides the place in which he was, and then suddenly he heard a noise; and, looking up, he saw a trap door in the roof open, and a sack of flour begin gradually to come down.

"Hilloa, hilloa!" he cried, "Mrs. Lovett — Mrs. Lovett!"

Down came the flour, and the trap door was closed.

"Oh, I can't stand this sort of thing," he exclaimed; "I cannot be made into a mere machine for the manufacture of pies. I cannot and will not endure it — it is past all bearing."

For the first time almost since his incarceration, for such it really was, he began to think that he would take an accurate survey of the place where this tempting manufacture was carried on. The fact was, his mind had been so intensely occupied during the time he had been there in providing merely for his physical wants, that he had scarcely had time to think or reason upon the probabilities of an uncomfortable termination of his career; but now, when he had really become quite surfeited with the pies, and tired of the darkness and gloom of the place, many unknown fears began to creep across him, and he really trembled, as he asked himself what was to be the end of all. It was with such a feeling as this that he now set about a careful and accurate survey of the place; and taking a little lamp in his hand, he resolved upon peering into every corner of it, with a hope that surely he should find some means by which he should effect an escape from what otherwise threatened to be an intolerable imprisonment. The vault in which the ovens were situated was the largest; and although a number of smaller ones communicated with it, containing the different mechanical contrivances for pie making, he could not from any one of them discover an outlet. But it was to the vault where the meat was deposited upon stone shelves that he paid the greatest share of attention, for to that vault he felt convinced there must be some hidden and secret means of ingress, and therefore of egress likewise, or else how came the shelves always so well stocked with meat as they were? This vault was larger than any of the other subsidiary ones, and the roof was very high, and, come into it when he would, it always happened that he found meat enough upon the shelves, cut into large lumps, and sometimes into slices, to make a batch of pies with. When it got there, was not so much a mystery to him as how it got there; for, of course, as he must sleep sometimes, he concluded, naturally enough, that it was brought in by some means during the period that he devoted to repose. He stood in the centre of this vault with the lamp in his hand, and he turned slowly round, surveying the walls and the ceilings with the most critical and marked attention, but not the smallest appearance of an outlet was observable. In fact, the walls were so entirely filled up with the stone shelves, that there was no space left for a door;

and as for the ceiling, it seemed perfectly entire. Then the floor was of earth; so that the idea of a trap door opening in it was out of the question, because there was no one on his side of it to place the earth again over it, and give it its compact and usual appearance.

"This is most mysterious," he said; "and if ever I could have been brought to believe that any one had the assistance of the devil himself in conducting human affairs, I should say that by some means Mrs. Lovett had made it worth the while of that elderly individual to assist her; for, unless the meat gets here by some supernatural agency, I really cannot see how it can get here at all. And yet here it is — so fresh, and pure, and white looking, although I never could tell the pork from the veal myself, for they seemed to me both alike."

He now made a still narrower examination of this vault, but he gained nothing by that. He found that the walls at the back of the shelves were composed of flat pieces of stone, which, no doubt, were necessary for the support of the shelves themselves; but beyond that he made no further discovery, and he was about leaving the place, when he fancied he saw some writing on the inner side of the door. A closer inspection convinced him that there were a number of lines written with lead pencil, and after some difficulty he decyphered them as follows: —

"Whatever unhappy wretch reads these lines may bid adieu to the world and all hope, for he is a doomed man! He will never emerge from these vaults with life, for there is a secret connected with them so awful and so hideous, that to write it makes one's blood curdle, and the flesh to creep upon my bones. That secret is this — and you may be assured, whoever is reading these lines, that I write the truth, and that it is as impossible to make that awful truth worse by any exaggeration, as it would be by a candle at midday to attempt to add any new lustre to the sunbeams."

Here, most unfortunately, the writing broke off, and our friend, who, up to this point, had perused the lines with the most intense interest, felt great bitterness of disappointment, from the fact that enough should have been written to stimulate his curiosity to the highest possible point, but not enough to gratify it.

"This is, indeed, most provoking," he exclaimed. "What can this most dreadful secret be, which it is impossible to exaggerate? I cannot, for a moment, divine to what it can allude."

In vain he searched over the door for some more writing — there was none to be found, and from the long straggling pencil mark, which followed the last word, it seemed as if he who had been then writing had been interrupted, and possibly met the fate that he had predicted, and was about to explain the reason of.

"This is worse than no information. I had better have remained in ignorance than have received so indistinct a warning; but they shall not find me an easy

victim, and, besides, what power on earth can force me to make pies unless I like, I should wish to know?"

As he stepped out of the place in which the meat was kept into the large vault where the ovens were, he trod upon a piece of paper that was lying upon the ground, and which he was quite certain he had not observed before. It was fresh and white, and clean too, so that it could not have been long there, and he picked it up with some curiosity. That curiosity was, however, soon turned to dismay when he saw what was written upon it, which was to the following effect, and well calculated to produce a considerable amount of alarm in the breast of any one situated as he was, so entirely friendless and so entirely hopeless of any extraneous aid in those dismal vaults, which he began, with a shudder, to suspect would be his tomb: —

"You are getting dissatisfied, and therefore it becomes necessary to explain to you your real position, which is simply this: — You are a prisoner, and were such from the first moment that you set foot where you now are; and you will find, unless you are resolved upon sacrificing your life, that your best plan will be to quietly give into the circumstances in which you find yourself placed. Without going into any argument or details upon the subject, it is sufficient to inform you that so long as you continue to make the pies, you will be safe; but if you refuse, then the first time you are caught asleep your throat will be cut."

This document was so much to the purpose, and really had so little of verbosity about it, that it was extremely difficult to doubt its sincerity. It dropped from the half paralysed hands of that man, who, in the depth of his distress, and urged on by great necessity, had accepted a situation that he would have given worlds to escape from, had he been possessed of them.

"Gracious Heaven!" he exclaimed, "And am I then indeed condemned to such a slavery? Is it possible, that even in the heart of London, I am a prisoner, and without the means of resisting the most frightful threats that are uttered against me? Surely, surely this must be all a dream! It is too terrific to be true!"

He sat down upon that low stool where his predecessor had sat before, receiving his death wound from the assassin who had glided in behind him, and dealt him that crashing blow, whose only mercy was that it had at once deprived the victim of existence. He could have wept bitterly, wept as he there sat, for he thought over days long passed away, of opportunities let go by with the heedless laugh of youth; he thought over all the chances and fortunes of his life, and now to find himself the miserable inhabitant of a cellar, condemned to a mean and troublesome employment, without even the liberty of leaving that, to starve if he chose, upon pain of death — a frightful death, which had been threatened him, was indeed torment! No wonder that at times he felt himself unnerved, and that a child might have conquered him, while at other moments such a feeling of despair would come across him, that he called aloud upon his enemies to make their appearance, and give him at least the chance of a struggle for his life.

"If I am to die," he cried, "let me die with some weapon in my hand, as a brave man ought, and I will not complain, for there is little indeed in life now which should induce me to cling to it; but I will not be murdered in the dark."

He sprang to his feet, and rushing up to the door, which opened from the house into the vaults, he made a violent and desperate effort to shake it. But such a contingency as this had surely been looked forward to and provided against, for the door was of amazing strength, and most effectually resisted all his efforts, so that the result of his endeavours was but to exhaust himself, and he staggered back, panting and despairing, to the seat he had so recently left. Then he heard a voice, and upon looking up he saw that the small square opening in the upper part of the door, through which he had been before addressed, was open, and a face there appeared, but it was not the face of Mrs. Lovett. On the contrary, it was a large and hideous male physiognomy, and the voice that came from it was croaking and harsh, sounding most unmusically upon the ears of the unfortunate man who was thus made a victim to Mrs. Lovett's pie popularity.

"Continue at your work," said the voice, "or death will be your portion as soon as sleep overcomes you, and you sink exhausted to that repose which you will never awaken from, except to feel the pangs of death, and to be conscious that you are weltering in your blood. Continue at your work, and you will escape all this — neglect it, and your doom is sealed."

"What have I done that I should be made such a victim of? Let me go, and I will swear never to divulge the fact that I have been in these vaults, so I cannot disclose any of their secrets, even if knew them."

"Make pies," said the voice, "eat them, and be happy. How many a man would envy your position — withdrawn from all the struggles of existence, amply provided with board and lodging, and engaged in a pleasant and delightful occupation; it is astonishing how you can be dissatisfied!"

"Bang!" went the little square orifice at the top of the door, and the voice was heard no more. The jeering mockery of those tones, however, still lingered upon the ear of the unhappy prisoner, and he clasped his head in his hands with a fearful impression upon his brain that he surely must be going mad.

"He will drive me to insanity," he cried; "already I feel a sort of slumber stealing over me for want of exercise, and the confined air of these vaults hinder me from taking regular repose; but now, if I close an eye, I shall expect to find the assassin's knife at my throat."

He sat for some time longer, and not even the dread he had of sleep could prevent a drowsiness creeping across his faculties, and this weariness would not be shaken off by any ordinary means, until at length he sprang to his feet, and shaking himself roughly, like one determined to be wide awake, he said to himself, mournfully —

“I must do their bidding or die; hope may be a delusion here, but I cannot altogether abandon it, and not until its faintest image has departed from my breast can I lie down to sleep and say — Let death come in any shape it may, it is welcome.”

With a desperate and despairing energy he set about replenishing the furnaces of the oven, and, when he had got them all in a good state, he commenced manufacturing a batch of one hundred pies, which, when he had finished and placed upon the tray, and set the machine in motion which conducted them up to the shop, he considered to be a sort of price paid for his continued existence, and flinging himself upon the ground, he fell into a deep slumber.