***David Copperfield***

### *Chapter 19 – I Look About Me and Make a Discovery*

***Summary:***

* David is very attached to Doctor Strong and happy at school, but he is ready to move on to the next phase of his life.
* David and Miss Betsey spend lots of time talking about what David should *do* with his life.
* Mr. Dick makes only one suggestion, that David should be a brazier (which is metal bowl used to hold coals or fire). Miss Betsey looks so annoyed at this that Mr. Dick never tries to offer his opinion on the subject again.
* One day around Christmas, Miss Betsey makes David a proposal: why doesn't he go down to Yarmouth to see Peggotty?
* Miss Betsey tells David that his feelings for Peggotty are natural and rational, and that David should always be both of those things.
* David's aunt also comments that David is the living image of his mother, with lots of his father in him as well.
* She advises that David must be resolute, determined, and morally firm.
* Miss Betsey wants to give David a sense of independence, so she tells him to go on this trip to Yarmouth by himself.
* Miss Betsey hands David a fair amount of money and sends him on his way.
* David stops in Canterbury to see Agnes and Mr. Wickfield.
* David tells Agnes that she is good, gentle, and always right – so he wants to confide in her.
* Agnes thinks it's another crush on a lady, but it isn't – and David also tells Agnes that there is no one worthy of her love, either.
* When Agnes falls in love, David tells her he will expect a lot of her fiancé.
* He thinks Agnes is so superior that he can't bear the thought of her tying herself to an unworthy admirer.
* Agnes seizes the opportunity to ask David something, since she will probably not see him again for some time.
* She wants to know if David has observed any change in Mr. Wickfield.
* David has: possibly as a result of Mr. Wickfield's drinking so much, his physical condition is getting worse.
* Mr. Wickfield's hands tremble all the time, his speech is unclear, and he seems totally stressed out.
* Whenever Mr. Wickfield is clearly at his most stressed, Uriah Heep calls on him to work.
* And the more that Uriah Heep calls on Mr. Wickfield to work when he is unfit, the more nervous and unsettled Mr. Wickfield becomes.
* David tells Agnes that, just the other day, he saw Mr. Wickfield put his head in his arms and cry like a child.
* Agnes stops David from talking because Mr. Wickfield comes into the room.
* David observes that Agnes looks at Mr. Wickfield with great gratitude, love, and worry for his condition.
* David is deeply moved by her feelings for her father.
* The Wickfields and David are due at Doctor Strong's house for tea.
* Doctor Strong tells them that he plans to retire soon and leave his school to his lead teacher.
* The school master asks Mr. Wickfield to draw up the contracts for him when the time comes.
* Mr. Wickfield warns Doctor Strong once again not to let himself be taken advantage of.
* Once Doctor Strong has retired, he will think of only two things: his dictionary, and Annie.
* Annie looks timidly at Mr. Wickfield.
* Mr. Wickfield notices that Doctor Strong has received a letter from India.
* Mrs. Markleham (Annie Strong's mother) chimes in: she is sure that Jack Maldon is very sick, what with having to live in India's hot climate.
* Mr. Wickfield asks if Jack Maldon has actually said anything about illness in his letters.
* Mrs. Markleham admits that Jack Maldon has not said that he is sick, but that he also never would: Jack Maldon would never complain if it meant violating Doctor Strong's plans for him.
* Doctor Strong puts in that these were Mr. Wickfield's arrangements; Doctor Strong would have been fine with having Jack Maldon either at home or abroad.
* Mr. Wickfield adds that he was the one to send Jack Maldon abroad.
* Mrs. Markleham predicts that Jack Maldon will *die* in India before coming home and ruining anyone's arrangements for him.
* Doctor Strong totally doesn't mind changing arrangements if Jack Maldon is really as sick as all that. He would be happy to find Jack Maldon a more suitable job here in England if that's the case.
* Mrs. Markleham is so overcome by the Doctor's generosity that she praises him repeatedly and demands that Annie show her gratitude.
* Throughout all of this, Annie stays silent with her eyes cast down.
* Mrs. Markleham reads out a piece of Jack Maldon's letter to Doctor Strong: apparently, Jack has been sick, and he has to come back to England to recover for a time.
* The pushy lady demands that Annie produce the letter Jack Maldon wrote to her so that Mrs. Markleham can read out bits of that, too.
* Annie doesn't want to, but Mrs. Markleham *insists*.
* Mrs. Markleham reads out a, shall we say, *warmly worded* passage about how much Jack Maldon hates India and wants to come home. It's unclear whether he has actually been sick – he says that being there is "insupportable" (19.77), in other words, that it sucks. Jack Maldon insists on coming home, either on sick leave or by resigning from his job.
* Mr. Wickfield says nothing, but he looks thoughtful and severe.
* The Doctor likes music, so Agnes and Annie sing several duets together.
* David notices that Mr. Wickfield doesn't seem to approve of the friendliness between Agnes and Annie.
* David recalls the night when Jack Maldon left for India and begins to feel unformed suspicions about Annie's behavior.
* Still, the evening passes quickly.
* When it's time for David and the Wickfields to leave, something odd happens.
* Agnes reaches over to hug and kiss Annie, but Mr. Wickfield physically steps between them (as though accidentally) and pulls Agnes away.
* David finds this incredibly strange, and feels as though he is leaving the Doctor's house under a dark cloud.
* David worries that the Doctor's kindliness may be betrayed.
* The next morning, David departs Mr. Wickfield's house.
* David does his best to appear as old as possible, so he addresses the coachman condescendingly and in a gruff voice.
* David tells the coachman he's heading to Suffolk, the county where he is from.
* The coachman thinks David is going hunting in Suffolk and comments on some aspects of food there.
* David suddenly feels awkward: he's from Suffolk, but the coachman seems to know much more about it than he does.
* And it gets worse: the man sitting behind David is a horse and dog breeder.
* The coachman tells David that it seems wrong that such a great man should be sitting *behind David*.
* So David, blushing, offers the breeder his seat.
* David feels that he has somehow lost face: the order of seats in the coach is supposed to determine social status, and David (who's all dressed up and proud of it) has been physically moved down by some random dude with a squint who works with horses.
* Even so, riding in a carriage with a pocket full of money is a new and refreshing experience for David, and overall, he is enjoying the trip.
* They drive by David's old school, Salem House, and he has a brief fantasy of getting out of the carriage and whipping Mr. Creakle.
* David stops at an inn in London.
* Again, he tries to impress the waiter with his deep voice, but it doesn't seem to work that well. Anyway, David has dinner.
* After dinner, David goes to a play – Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.
* He is delighted to see all of these old Romans walking across the stage to entertain him.
* David is so impressed by the scenery and costuming that he can barely contain himself.
* Finally, David goes back to his inn, where he slowly comes to recognize a handsome, well-dressed young man sitting by the fire in the common room.
* David passes this young man on his way to bed and suddenly recognizes him: it is James Steerforth!
* Even though David recognizes him as soon as he sees Steerforth clearly, Steerforth doesn't put it together right away.
* Suddenly, Steerforth exclaims, "My God! [...] It's little Copperfield!" (19.126).
* David is so excited to see Steerforth that he almost cries.
* Steerforth tells David to calm down a bit, but Steerforth also seems pleased to see David.
* Currently, Steerforth is studying at Oxford (so, he's not living in London), but he's on his way to visit his mother.
* David informs Steerforth that he has just been to a play, and that it was delightful and magnificent.
* Steerforth laughs at David and tells him that he's truly fresh and naive: Steerforth has also just seen that play, and it was miserably bad.
* Steerforth asks the waiter what room David has been assigned.
* Apparently, it's an awful room just over the stables.
* The waiter apologizes and offers David the room next to Steerforth's, since they hadn't realized that David was anybody in particular.
* Steerforth laughs at the terrible room David was given and invites him to breakfast the next morning.
* David is thrilled, and falls asleep looking forward to the new day.

***Synopsis:***

David sets off on a monthlong journey to Yarmouth, to the home of Peggotty and her family, to decide what profession to pursue. He takes his leave of Agnes and Mr. Wickfield, and Doctor Strong throws a going-away party in David’s honor. At the party, Annie’s mother reveals that Jack Maldon has sent Doctor Strong a letter in which he claims that he is ill and likely to return soon on sick leave. But Annie has received another letter from Jack Maldon indicating that he wants to return because he misses her.

The next morning, David leaves on the London coach and tries to appear as manly as possible. Nonetheless, the coachman asks him to resign his seat of honor to an older man. David spends the evening at an inn, where the waiter pokes fun at his youthfulness and the chambermaid gives him a pitiful room. David attends a play, returns to the inn, and discovers Steerforth in a sitting room. Steerforth is now attending Oxford but is bored by his studies and is on his way home to see his mother. David and Steerforth are happily reunited, and the inn staff immediately treat David with respect.

***Critical Analysis:***

David finishes school and is trying to find a suitable career. His aunt suggests that he visit Peggotty in Yarmouth to clear his head and do some research into various professions. Before he sets out for London, he goes to say goodbye to all his friends in Canterbury. During his visit to the Wickfields, Agnes confesses that she is worried about her father's drinking problem and the influence that Uriah Heep is starting to have over him. During his visit to Dr. Strong, the subject of Jack Maldon comes up again. The decision is made to bring Jack Maldon back from India. Mr. Wickfield shows his suspicions of Mrs. Strong by trying to keep her from touching or coming close to Agnes.

David sets out on his journey to London, and tries to act mature. He arrives in London and happens to see Steerforth at his hotel. They get reacquainted and renew their old friendship.

Miss Betsey's suggestion that David take a vacation shows her great affection for him and her need to see that he is happy. As David leaves, there are many hints of negative things to come: first for Mr. Wickfield because of his drinking, and second for Dr. and Mrs. Strong because of the suspicions hovering over Mrs. Strong and Maldon.

David's reunion with Steerforth is one of many unlikely reunions that will take place throughout the story, fueling the plot with these coincidences. The immediate reconnection of their former friendship shows that David is still extremely vulnerable to strong personalities such as Steerforth's and foreshadows further trouble for David because of this strong attachment.

***Critical Study :***

[David Copperfield](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#David_Copperfield) finishes school and is having trouble deciding on a profession, so [Miss Betsey](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#Miss_Betsey) suggests he might take some time before he makes a decision. He goes to Canterbury to move out of his room at Mr. Wickfield's house and to see [Agnes Wickfield](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#Agnes_Wickfield) and Doctor Strong. David and Agnes worry Mr. Wickfield's habit of drinking too much wine is becoming detrimental to his health and to his work. They all go to Doctor Strong's for tea, where talk turns to Jack Maldon, who wants to return from India. The subject of Jack Maldon makes both Annie and Mr. Wickfield uncomfortable, and David wonders if there may have been something improper in the relationship between Annie Strong and Jack.

David takes the coach to London, determined to assert himself as a young man about town. However, his youth soon betrays him and he's persuaded to give up his prized place in the coach to "a shabby man with a squint." In London, David is given a musty little room at his hotel. After returning from a play at Covent Garden Theatre, he encounters his old friend [James Steerforth](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#James_Steerforth) in the hotel bar. Steerforth has just seen the same play, and calls David "a very Daisy" for praising the play. He orders the waiter to change David's room to a better one, next to his. They plan to meet at breakfast in the morning.

***Summary and analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) is excited to finish school and become independent. However, he does not have a clear idea of what he wants to do with his life, despite many talks on the subject with his aunt and [Mr. Dick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-dick). Eventually, [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood) suggests that he take some time to mull over the matter by going to see [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) and her family. David agrees, and his aunt indicates that she is very proud of him—though she attributes this feeling to [Clara Copperfield](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield) rather than owning up to it directly. She also cautions David, however, that she wants him to be a "firm fellow," unlike the parents he closely resembles.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Although David is eager to grow up, his lack of any clear goal in life is a sign of his relative immaturity. Miss Betsey's pointed words to him reflect not only the necessity of choosing a career, but also her hope that settling into said career will shore up David's character, making him more purposeful and better able to withstand external pressure. Meanwhile, by attributing her pride in David to Clara, Miss Betsey reveals some of the difficulties associated with nineteenth-century female gender norms; because femininity was seen as incompatible with independence and strength, Miss Betsey seems to feel that she needs to suppress any conventionally feminine emotions in order to survive as a single woman.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood) sends [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) off with enough money to do what he likes for three or four weeks. His first stop is Canterbury, where he says goodbye to [Agnes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/agnes-wickfield) and tells her that being apart from her is like missing his "right hand." He also promises to always tell her of any major changes in his life, including any romances. He then wonders aloud why Agnes herself hasn't fallen in love yet, though he says he would probably deem any man she liked to be undeserving of her.

***Analysis Part 2:***

David's description of Agnes as his "right hand" suggests that he knows how crucial her advice and support is to him. Nevertheless, he fails to recognize that he's essentially already relying on her as if she were his wife—not to mention the significance of the fact that he doesn't want her to marry anyone else.

***Summary Part 3:***

The conversation turns more serious as [Agnes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/agnes-wickfield) asks whether [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) has noticed any change in [Mr. Wickfield](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-wickfield). David admits that he has, and delicately attributes it to increased drinking. He also remarks that [Uriah Heep](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/uriah-heep) often calls Mr. Wickfield away to do business when he is at his drunkest, which Wickfield himself always seems ashamed of afterwards. Mr. Wickfield himself appears at this moment, however, and as Agnes goes to meet him, David notices how tenderly and lovingly she interacts with her father.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Although Uriah takes advantage of Mr. Wickfield's alcoholism to further his own ambitions, Wickfield's behavior is itself a moral flaw. Wickfield himself will eventually admit that he sees his alcoholism as a weakness tied to his tendency to allow his memories to overtake him. In fact, Mr. Wickfield's lack of self-control causes him to revert to a childlike state at times. Agnes, meanwhile, continues to take on a maternal role when interacting with her father, highlighting just how upside-down their family situation has become.

***Summary Part 4:***

Later, [Mr. Wickfield](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-wickfield), [Agnes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/agnes-wickfield), and [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) all go to have tea at [Doctor Strong](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/doctor-strong)'s. The Doctor says he plans to retire from his position as headmaster soon so that he can focus exclusively on his dictionary and [Annie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/annie-strong). This reminds Mr. Wickfield of [Jack Maldon](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/jack-maldon), who has recently written to the Strongs. [Mrs. Markleham](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-markleham) laments that Maldon is too frail to endure the Indian climate. Annie refuses to corroborate this, however, and it emerges that Maldon's letters have not said much about his supposed sickness—something Mrs. Markleham attributes to stoicism and a wish to avoid disappointing Doctor Strong. Mr. Wickfield reminds everyone that he found Maldon his position and takes full responsibility for the consequences, but Doctor Strong remarks that he is open to finding Maldon a position closer to home if, as Mrs. Markleham says, his life is in danger.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Maldon's ongoing attempts to avoid work serve as a cautionary tale for David, particularly in the context of Miss Betsey's words at the beginning of the chapter. What's more, Mrs. Markleham's concern for her nephew (whether real or exaggerated) borders on infantilizing, further underscoring Maldon's refusal to accept the responsibilities of an adult man. Meanwhile, Mr. Wickfield's attempt to take the blame for Maldon's posting reflects his ongoing concern about the nature of Maldon and Annie's relationship; anticipating that Doctor Strong will offer to help Maldon return, Wickfield jumps in an attempt to keep Annie and her cousin far apart from one another.

***Summary part 5:***

[Mrs. Markleham](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-markleham) thanks [Doctor Strong](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/doctor-strong) profusely and urges [Annie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/annie-strong)—unsuccessfully—to do the same. She then reads aloud from [Maldon](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/jack-maldon)'s letter to her in order to prove to [Mr. Wickfield](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-wickfield) that he is ill. When that doesn't work, she badgers Annie to show her own letter from Maldon, in which he states that he will need to return on sick leave, because his life in India is "insupportable."

***Analysis Part 5:***

In addition to taking advantage of Doctor Strong's kindness, Mrs. Markleham also repeatedly oversteps her authority as a mother: despite the fact that Annie is both an adult woman and married, Mrs. Markleham harasses her and ignores her boundaries, forcing her to share private correspondence.

***Summary part 6:***

The rest of the evening goes more smoothly, although [Mr. Wickfield](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-wickfield) seems troubled and continues to shoot glances at [Doctor Strong](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/doctor-strong) and [Annie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/annie-strong). When Annie and [Agnes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/agnes-wickfield) sing and play duets together, [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) realizes that Mr. Wickfield disapproves of his daughter's friendship with Mrs. Strong; in fact, he even prevents them from embracing when the night is over. Thinking back to the party the night [Jack Maldon](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/jack-maldon) went away, David suddenly realizes that Annie may be having an affair. This disturbs David, and seems to cast both Annie and all his happy memories of Doctor Strong and school in a new light.

***Analysis Part 6:***

David's reconsideration of his childhood memories is in some ways the opposite of the nostalgia that colors much of the novel. Rather than idealizing the past, David now realizes that his impression of the Strong household was romanticized. This is an indication of how David's perspective has shifted and become more realistic as he has matured. Mr. Wickfield's behavior in this passage is also significant: his wish to keep Agnes and Annie apart implies that sexual promiscuity is somehow contagious.

***Summary Part 7:***

David is sad to leave [Agnes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/agnes-wickfield)'s house, which he realizes he will never live in again. However, he tries very hard to conceal his feelings out of a wish to appear "manly." He continues to act as much like an adult as possible during the coach ride to London, answering the driver's questions about his planned trip in a condescending and indifferent manner. Eventually, however, the driver hints that David should give up his seat in the front of the coach to another rider—a "shabby man with a squint." David agrees, but feels both insulted and deeply insecure. Nevertheless, he enjoys the ride—particularly passing by places that stir up old memories, like Salem House.

***Analysis Part 7:***

David's preoccupation with looking and acting like an adult clearly stems from insecurity: he realizes on some level that he isn't fully grown up and wishes to conceal it. This deep anxiety about what others will think of him is itself a sign of immaturity, since a truly mature man (as Miss Betsey earlier suggested) wouldn’t be so influenced by the opinions of those around him. His fond recollections of Salem House and his home with the Wickfield also signal a reluctance to leave childhood fully behind.

***Summary Part 8:***

David arrives in London and takes a room at an inn, where he continues to try to act as maturely and impressively as possible. He resists the waiter's suggestions on what to order, for instance, and asks him to check for any letters he may have received. Nevertheless, the waiter takes advantage of David's inexperience by giving him the dregs of several bottles of wine.

***Analysis Part 8:***

Once again, David's excessive concern with the appearance of adulthood suggests that he hasn't quite attained it yet; the "firm fellow" Miss Betsey described earlier in the chapter would be more confident of his own actions and less worried about what others think of him.

***Summary Part 9:***

Later that evening, [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) goes to Covent Garden Theatre and sees a production of [Julius Caesar](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/julius-caesar) that deeply impresses him. After returning to the inn, David sits meditating on both the performance and his past, when he notices that another young man has entered the coffee-room. As David rises to go to bed, he passes by the man and, realizing it is [James Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth), calls out to him. David is overwhelmed by the encounter, while Steerforth seems both pleased to see his friend and pleased that David thinks so highly of him.

***Analysis Part 9:***

The fact that David recounters Steerforth immediately after seeing [Julius Caesar](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/julius-caesar)—a play famously about treachery among friends—is ominous, and foreshadows Steerforth's ultimate betrayal of David's trust. At the time, however, David is simply excited to see his old friend from school, perhaps in part because he was already reminiscing about the past.

***Summary Part 10:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) and [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) sit down to chat, and David explains why he is in London. Steerforth then reveals that he is (half-heartedly) studying at Oxford, and is currently returning home to visit his mother, [Mrs. Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-steerforth). It turns out that Steerforth also saw the play in Covent Garden, which David praises enthusiastically. Steerforth is amused by this, however, and calls David a "very Daisy," saying that the production was terrible. He then calls over the waiter and questions him about which room David has been assigned to, until the waiter agrees to move him to a better one. Before they part for the night, Steerforth asks David to have breakfast with him the next morning, and David delightedly agrees.

***Analysis Part 10:***

Steerforth and David's conversation underscores just how naïve David still is in many ways—not only because of his overly enthusiastic reaction to the play, but also because the nickname Steerforth gives him, in its femininity, suggests innocence and vulnerability. On the other hand, the novel suggests that Steerforth's relative cynicism is immature in its own way: his boredom with everything is part of what prevents him from sticking to any course of action, since nothing holds his attention and interest.