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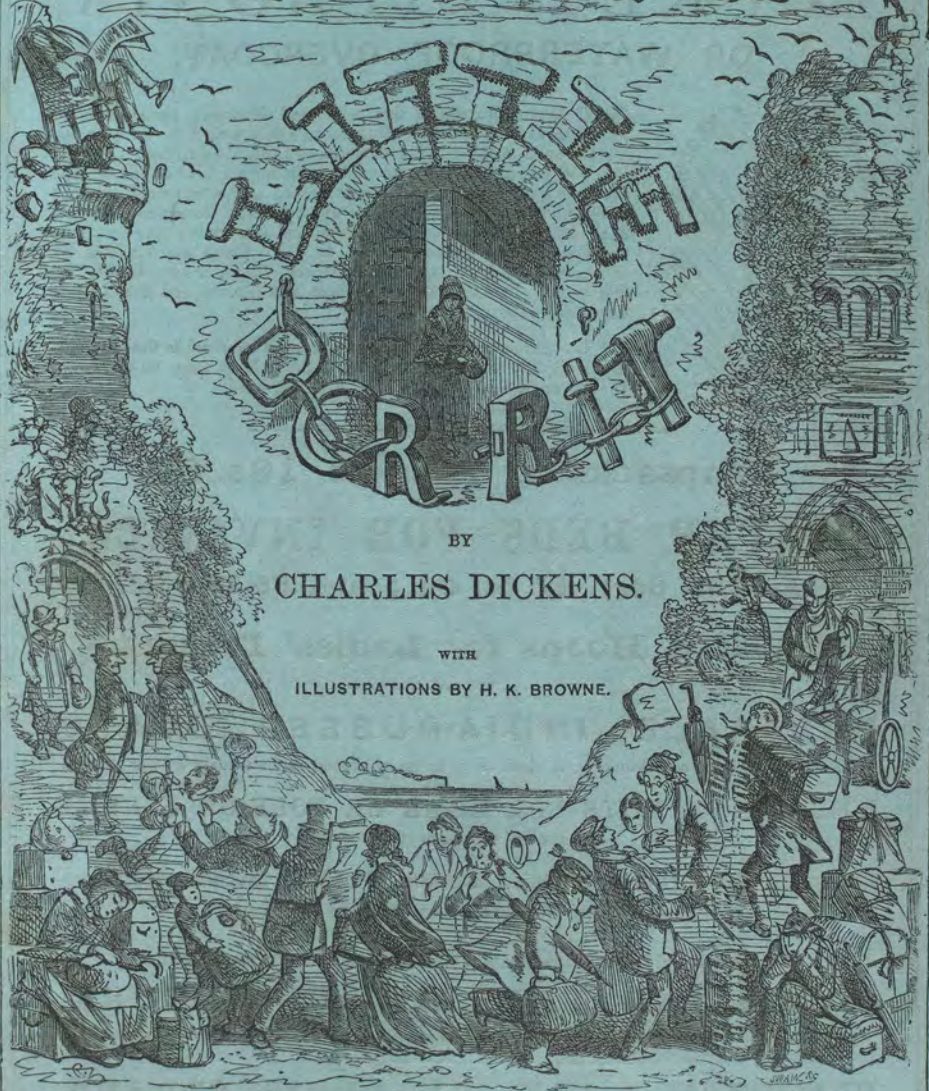
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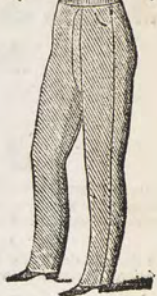
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THE SYDENHAM TROUSERS.
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SHIPPERS SUPPLIED.

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WASHING
17 1/2



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- 5. to 9th. 10.

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The Patriotic Conference.

The British Consulate



Mr. Rogers is supposed to have been writing



Mr. Baptist is supposed to have seen something

CHAPTER XII

THE HISTORY OF THE

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CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH A GREAT PATRIOTIC CONFERENCE IS HOLDEN.

THE famous name of Merdle became, every day, more famous in the land. Nobody knew that the Merdle of such high renown had ever done any good to any one, alive or dead, or to any earthly thing; nobody knew that he had any capacity or utterance of any sort in him, which had ever thrown, for any creature, the feeblest farthing-candle ray of light on any path of duty or diversion, pain or pleasure, toil or rest, fact or fancy, among the multiplicity of paths in the labyrinth trodden by the sons of Adam; nobody had the smallest reason for supposing the clay of which this object of worship was made, to be other than the commonest clay, with as clogged a wick smouldering inside of it as ever kept an image of humanity from tumbling to pieces. All people knew (or thought they knew) that he had made himself immensely rich; and, for that reason alone, prostrated themselves before him, more degradedly and less excusably than the darkest savage creeps out of his hole in the ground to propitiate, in some log or reptile, the Deity of his benighted soul.

Nay, the high priests of this worship had the man before them as a protest against their meanness. The multitude worshipped on trust—though always distinctly knowing why—but the officiators at the altar had the man habitually in their view. They sat at his feasts, and he sat at theirs. There was a spectre always attendant on him, saying to these high priests, “Are such the signs you trust, and love to honor; this head, these eyes, this mode of speech, the tone and manner of this man? You are the levers of the Circumlocution Office, and the rulers of men. When half-a-dozen of you fall out by the ears, it seems that mother earth can give birth to no other rulers. Does your qualification lie in the superior knowledge of men, which accepts, courts, and puffs this man? Or, if you are competent to judge aright the signs I never fail to show you when he appears among you, is your superior honesty your qualification?” Two rather ugly questions these, always going about town with Mr. Merdle; and there was a tacit agreement that they must be stifled.

In Mrs. Merdle's absence abroad, Mr. Merdle still kept the great house open, for the passage through it of a stream of visitors. A few of these took affable possession of the establishment. Three or four ladies of distinction and liveliness used to say to one another, “Let us dine at our dear Merdle's next Thursday. Whom shall we have?” Our dear Merdle would then receive his instructions; and would sit heavily among the company at table and wander lumpishly about his drawing-rooms afterwards, only remarkable for appearing to have nothing to do with the entertainment beyond being in its way.

The Chief Butler, the Avenging-Spirit of this great man's life, relaxed nothing of his severity. He looked on at these dinners when the bosom was not there, as he looked on at other dinners when the bosom was there; and his eye was a basilisk to Mr. Merdle. He was a hard man, and would never bate an ounce of plate or a bottle of wine. He would not allow a dinner to be given, unless it was up to his mark. He set forth the table for his own dignity. If the guests chose to partake of what was served, he saw no objection; but it was served for the maintenance of his rank. As he stood by the sideboard he seemed to announce, "I have accepted office to look at this which is now before me, and to look at nothing less than this." If he missed the presiding bosom, it was as a part of his own state of which he was, from unavoidable circumstances, temporarily deprived. Just as he might have missed a centre-piece, or a choice wine-cooler, which had been sent to the Banker's.

Mr. Merdle issued invitations for a Barnacle dinner. Lord Decimus was to be there, Mr. Tite Barnacle was to be there, the pleasant young Barnacle was to be there; and the Chorus of Parliamentary Barnacles who went about the provinces when the House was up, warbling the praises of their Chief, were to be represented there. It was understood to be a great occasion. Mr. Merdle was going to take up the Barnacles. Some delicate little negotiations had occurred between him and the noble Decimus—the young Barnacle of engaging manners acting as negotiator—and Mr. Merdle had decided to cast the weight of his great probity and great riches into the Barnacle scale. Jobbery was suspected by the malicious; perhaps because it was indisputable that if the adherence of the immortal Enemy of Mankind could have been secured by a job, the Barnacles would have jobbed him—for the good of the country, for the good of the country.

Mrs. Merdle had written to this magnificent spouse of hers, whom it was heresy to regard as anything less than all the British Merchants since the days of Whittington rolled into one, and gilded three feet deep all over—had written to this spouse of hers, several letters from Rome, in quick succession, urging upon him with importunity that now or never was the time to provide for Edmund Sparkler. Mrs. Merdle had shown him that the case of Edmund was urgent, and that infinite advantages might result from his having some good thing directly. In the grammar of Mrs. Merdle's verbs on this momentous subject, there was only one Mood, the Imperative; and that Mood has only one Tense, the Present. Mrs. Merdle's verbs were so pressingly presented to Mr. Merdle to conjugate, that his sluggish blood and his long coat-cuffs became quite agitated.

In which state of agitation, Mr. Merdle, evasively rolling his eyes round the Chief Butler's shoes without raising them to the index of that stupendous creature's thoughts, had signified to him his intention of giving a special dinner: not a very large dinner, but a very special dinner. The Chief Butler had signified, in return, that he had no objection to look on at the most expensive thing in that way that could be done: and the day of the dinner was now come.

Mr. Merdle stood in one of his drawing-rooms, with his back to the fire, waiting for the arrival of his important guests. He seldom or

never took the liberty of standing with his back to his fire, unless he was quite alone. In the presence of the Chief Butler, he could not have done such a deed. He would have clasped himself by the wrists in that constabulary manner of his, and have paced up and down the hearthrug, or gone creeping about among the rich objects of furniture, if his oppressive retainer had appeared in the room at that very moment. The sly shadows which seemed to dart out of hiding when the fire rose, and to dart back into it when the fire fell, were sufficient witnesses of his making himself so easy. They were even more than sufficient, if his uncomfortable glances at them might be taken to mean anything.

Mr. Merdle's right hand was filled with the evening paper, and the evening paper was full of Mr. Merdle. His wonderful enterprise, his wonderful wealth, his wonderful Bank, were the fattening food of the evening paper that night. The wonderful Bank, of which he was the chief projector, establisher, and manager, was the latest of the many Merdle wonders. So modest was Mr. Merdle withal, in the midst of these splendid achievements, that he looked far more like a man in possession of his house under a distrait, than a commercial Colossus bestriding his own hearthrug, while the little ships were sailing in to dinner.

Behold the vessels coming into port! The engaging young Barnacle was the first arrival; but Bar overtook him on the staircase. Bar, strengthened as usual with his double eye-glass and his little jury droop, was overjoyed to see the engaging young Barnacle; and opined that we were going to sit *in Banco*, as we lawyers called it, to take a special argument?

"Indeed," said the sprightly young Barnacle, whose name was Ferdinand: "how so?"

"Nay," smiled Bar. "If *you* don't know, how can *I* know? *You* are in the innermost sanctuary of the temple; *I* am one of the admiring concourse on the plain without."

Bar could be light in hand, or heavy in hand, according to the customer he had to deal with. With Ferdinand Barnacle he was gossamer. Bar was likewise always modest and self-depreciatory—in his way. Bar was a man of great variety; but one leading thread ran through the woof of all his patterns. Every man with whom he had to do was, in his eyes, a juryman; and he must get that juryman over, if he could.

"Our illustrious host and friend," said Bar; "our shining mercantile star;—going into politics?"

"Going? He has been in Parliament some time, you know," returned the engaging young Barnacle.

"True," said Bar, with his light-comedy laugh for special jury-men: which was a very different thing from his low-comedy laugh for comic tradesmen on common juries: "he has been in Parliament for some time. Yet hitherto our star has been a vacillating and wavering star? Humph?"

An average witness would have been seduced by the Humph? into an affirmative answer. But Ferdinand Barnacle looked knowingly at Bar as they strolled up-stairs, and gave him no answer at all.

“Just so, just so,” said Bar, nodding his head, for he was not to be put off in that way, “and therefore I spoke of our sitting *in Banco* to take a special argument—meaning this to be a high and solemn occasion, when, as Captain Macheath says, ‘the Judges are met: a terrible show!’ We lawyers are sufficiently liberal, you see, to quote the Captain, though the Captain is severe upon us. Nevertheless, I think I could put in evidence an admission of the Captain’s,” said Bar, with a little jocose roll of his head; for, in his legal current of speech, he always assumed the air of rallying himself with the best grace in the world: “an admission of the Captain’s that Law, in the gross, is at least intended to be impartial. For, what says the Captain, if I quote him correctly—and if not,” with a light-comedy touch of his double eye-glass on his companion’s shoulder, “my learned friend will set me right:

‘Since laws were made for every degree,
To curb vice in others as well as in me,
I wonder we ha’n’t better company
Upon Tyburn Tree!’”

These words brought them to the drawing-room, where Mr. Merdle stood before the fire. So immensely astounded was Mr. Merdle by the entrance of Bar with such a reference in his mouth, that Bar explained himself to have been quoting Gay. “Assuredly not one of our Westminster Hall authorities,” said he, “but still no despicable one to a man possessing the largely-practical Mr. Merdle’s knowledge of the world.”

Mr. Merdle looked as if he thought he would say something, but subsequently looked as if he thought he wouldn’t. The interval afforded time for Bishop to be announced.

Bishop came in with meekness, and yet with a strong and rapid step, as if he wanted to get his seven-league dress-shoes on, and go round the world to see that everybody was in a satisfactory state. Bishop had no idea that there was anything significant in the occasion. That was the most remarkable trait in his demeanour. He was crisp, fresh, cheerful, affable, bland; but so surprisingly innocent!

Bar slid up to prefer his politest enquiries in reference to the health of Mrs. Bishop. Mrs. Bishop had been a little unfortunate in the article of taking cold at a Confirmation, but otherwise was well. Young Mr. Bishop was also well. He was down, with his young wife and little family, at his Cure of Souls.

The representatives of the Barnacle Chorus dropped in next, and Mr. Merdle’s physician dropped in next. Bar, who had a bit of one eye and a bit of his double eye-glass for every one who came in at the door, no matter with whom he was conversing or what he was talking about, got among them all by some skilful means, without being seen to get at them, and touched each individual gentleman of the jury on his own individual favorite spot. With some of the Chorus, he laughed about the sleepy member who had gone out into the lobby the other night, and voted the wrong way: with others, he deplored that innovating spirit in the time which could not even be prevented from

taking an unnatural interest in the public service and the public money: with the physician he had a word to say about the general health; he had also a little information to ask him for, concerning a professional man, of unquestioned erudition and polished manners—but those credentials in their highest development he believed were the possession of other professors of the healing art (jury droop)—whom he had happened to have in the witness-box the day before yesterday, and from whom he had elicited in cross-examination that he claimed to be one of the exponents of this new mode of treatment which appeared to Bar to—eh?—well, Bar thought so; Bar had thought, and hoped, Physician would tell him so. Without presuming to decide where doctors disagreed, it did appear to Bar, viewing it as a question of common sense and not of so-called legal penetration, that this new system was—might he, in the presence of so great an authority—say, Humbug? Ah! Fortified by such encouragement, he could venture to say Humbug; and now Bar's mind was relieved.

Mr. Tite Barnacle, who, like Dr. Johnson's celebrated acquaintance, had only one idea in his head, and that was a wrong one, had appeared by this time. This eminent gentleman and Mr. Merdle, seated diverse ways and with ruminating aspects, on a yellow ottoman in the light of the fire, holding no verbal communication with each other, bore a strong general resemblance to the two cows in the Cuyp picture over against them.

But, now, Lord Decimus arrived. The Chief Butler, who up to this time had limited himself to a branch of his usual function by looking at the company as they entered (and that, with more of defiance than favor), put himself so far out of his way as to come upstairs with him and announce him. Lord Decimus being an overpowering peer, a bashful young member of the Lower House, who was the last fish but one caught by the Barnacles and who had been invited on this occasion to commemorate his capture, shut his eyes when his Lordship came in.

Lord Decimus nevertheless was glad to see the Member. He was also glad to see Mr. Merdle, glad to see Bishop, glad to see Bar, glad to see Physician, glad to see Tite Barnacle, glad to see Chorus, glad to see Ferdinand his private secretary. Lord Decimus, though one of the greatest of the earth, was not remarkable for ingratiatory manners, and Ferdinand had coached him up to the point of noticing all the fellows he might find there, and saying he was glad to see them. When he had achieved this rush of vivacity and condescension, his Lordship composed himself into the picture after Cuyp, and made a third cow in the group.

Bar, who felt that he had got all the rest of the jury and must now lay hold of the Foreman, soon came sliding up, double eye-glass in hand. Bar tendered the weather, as a subject neatly aloof from official reserve, for the Foreman's consideration. Bar said that he was told (as everybody always is told, though who tells them, and why, will for ever remain a mystery), that there was to be no wall-fruit this year. Lord Decimus had not heard anything amiss of his peaches, but rather believed, if his people were correct, he was to have no apples. No apples? Bar was lost in astonishment and concern. It would have

been all one to him, in reality, if there had not been a pippin on the surface of the earth, but his show of interest in this apple question was positively painful. Now, to what, Lord Decimus—for we troublesome lawyers loved to gather information, and could never tell how useful it might prove to us—to what, Lord Decimus, was this to be attributed? Lord Decimus could not undertake to propound any theory about it. This might have stopped another man; but, Bar sticking to him fresh as ever, said, “As to pears, now?”

Long after Bar got made Attorney-General, this was told of him as a master-stroke. Lord Decimus had a reminiscence about a pear-tree, formerly growing in a garden near the back of his dame's house at Eton, upon which pear-tree the only joke of his life perennially bloomed. It was a joke of a compact and portable nature, turning on the difference between Eton pears and Parliamentary pairs; but, it was a joke, a refined relish of which would seem to have appeared to Lord Decimus impossible to be had, without a thorough and intimate acquaintance with the tree. Therefore, the story at first had no idea of such a tree, sir, then gradually found it in winter, carried it through the changing seasons, saw it bud, saw it blossom, saw it bear fruit, saw the fruit ripen, in short cultivated the tree in that diligent and minute manner before it got out of the bed-room window to steal the fruit, that many thanks had been offered up by belated listeners for the tree's having been planted and grafted prior to Lord Decimus's time. Bar's interest in apples was so over-topped by the wrapt suspense in which he pursued the changes of these pears, from the moment when Lord Decimus solemnly opened with “Your mentioning pears recalls to my remembrance a pear-tree,” down to the rich conclusion, “And so we pass, through the various changes of life, from Eton pears to Parliamentary pairs,” that he had to go down-stairs with Lord Decimus, and even then to be seated next him at table, in order that he might hear the anecdote out. By that time, Bar felt that he had secured the Foreman, and might go to dinner with a good appetite.

It was a dinner to provoke an appetite, though he had not had one. The rarest dishes, sumptuously cooked and sumptuously served; the choicest fruits; the most exquisite wines; marvels of workmanship in gold and silver, china and glass; innumerable things delicious to the senses of taste, smell, and sight, were insinuated into its composition. O, what a wonderful man this Merdle, what a great man, what a master man, how blessedly and enviably endowed—in one word, what a rich man!

He took his usual poor eighteenpennyworth of food, in his usual indigestive way, and had as little to say for himself as ever a wonderful man had. Fortunately Lord Decimus was one of those sublimities who have no occasion to be talked to, for they can be at any time sufficiently occupied with the contemplation of their own greatness. This enabled the bashful young member to keep his eyes open long enough at a time to see his dinner. But, whenever Lord Decimus spoke, he shut them again.

The agreeable young Barnacle, and Bar, were the talkers of the party. Bishop would have been exceedingly agreeable also, but that his innocence stood in his way. He was so soon left behind. When

there was any little hint of anything being in the wind, he got lost directly. Worldly affairs were too much for him; he couldn't make them out at all.

This was observable when Bar said, incidentally, that he was happy to have heard that we were soon to have the advantage of enlisting on the good side, the sound and plain sagacity—not demonstrative or ostentatious, but thoroughly sound and practical—of our friend Mr. Sparkler.

Ferdinand Barnacle laughed, and said oh yes, he believed so. A vote was a vote, and always acceptable.

Bar was sorry to miss our good friend Mr. Sparkler to-day, Mr. Merdle.

"He is away with Mrs. Merdle," returned that gentleman, slowly coming out of a long abstraction, in the course of which he had been fitting a table-spoon up his sleeve. "It is not indispensable for him to be on the spot."

"The magic name of Merdle," said Bar, with the jury droop, "no doubt will suffice for all."

"Why—yes—I believe so," assented Mr. Merdle, putting the spoon aside, and clumsily hiding each of his hands in the coat-cuff of the other hand. "I believe the people in my interest down there, will not make any difficulty."

"Model people!" said Bar.

"I am glad you approve of them," said Mr. Merdle.

"And the people of those other two places, now," pursued Bar, with a bright twinkle in his keen eye, as it slightly turned in the direction of his magnificent neighbour; "we lawyers are always curious, always inquisitive, always picking up odds and ends for our patchwork minds, since there is no knowing when and where they may fit into some corner;—the people of those other two places, now? Do they yield so laudably to the vast and cumulative influence of such enterprise and such renown; do those little rills become absorbed so quietly and easily, and, as it were by the influence of natural laws, so beautifully, in the sloop of the majestic stream as it flows upon its wondrous way enriching the surrounding lands; that their course is perfectly to be calculated, and distinctly to be predicated?"

Mr. Merdle, a little troubled by Bar's eloquence, looked fitfully about the nearest salt-cellar for some moments, and then said, hesitating:

"They are perfectly aware, sir, of their duty to Society. They will return anybody I send to them for that purpose."

"Cheering to know," said Bar. "Cheering to know."

The three places in question were three little rotten holes in this Island, containing three little ignorant, drunken, guzzling, dirty, out of the way constituencies, that had reeled into Mr. Merdle's pocket. Ferdinand Barnacle laughed in his easy way, and airily said they were a nice set of fellows. Bishop, mentally perambulating among paths of peace, was altogether swallowed up in absence of mind.

"Pray," asked Lord Decimus, casting his eyes around the table, "what is this story I have heard of a gentleman long confined in a debtor's prison, proving to be of a wealthy family, and having come

into the inheritance of a large sum of money? I have met with a variety of allusions to it. Do you know anything of it, Ferdinand?"

"I only know this much," said Ferdinand, "that he has given the Department with which I have the honor to be associated;" this sparkling young Barnacle threw off the phrase sportively, as who should say, We know all about these forms of speech, but we must keep it up, we must keep the game alive; "no end of trouble, and has put us into innumerable fixes."

"Fixes?" repeated Lord Decimus, with a majestic pausing and pondering on the word that made the bashful member shut his eyes quite tight. "Fixes?"

"A very perplexing business indeed," observed Mr. Tite Barnacle, with an air of grave resentment.

"What," said Lord Decimus, "was the character of his business; what was the nature of these—a—fixes, Ferdinand?"

"Oh, it's a good story, as a story," returned that gentleman; "as good a thing of its kind, as need be. This Mr. Dorrit (his name is Dorrit) had incurred a responsibility to us, ages before the fairy came out of the Bank and gave him his fortune, under a bond he had signed for the performance of a contract which was not at all performed. He was partner in a house in some large way—spirits, or buttons, or wine, or blacking, or oatmeal, or woollen, or pork, or hooks and eyes, or iron, or treacle, or shoes, or something or other that was wanted for troops, or seamen, or somebody—and the house burst, and we being among the creditors, detainers were lodged on the part of the Crown in a scientific manner, and all the rest of it. When the fairy had appeared and he wanted to pay us off, Egad we had got into such an exemplary state of checking and counter-checking, signing and counter-signing, that it was six months before we knew how to take the money, or how to give a receipt for it. It was a triumph of public business," said this handsome young Barnacle, laughing heartily. "You never saw such a lot of forms in your life. 'Why,' the attorney said to me one day, 'if I wanted this office to give me two or three thousand pounds instead of take it, I couldn't have more trouble about it.' 'You are right, old fellow,' I told him, 'and in future you'll know that we have something to do here.'" The pleasant young Barnacle finished by once more laughing heartily. He was a very easy, pleasant fellow indeed, and his manners were exceedingly winning.

Mr. Tite Barnacle's view of the business was of a less airy character. He took it ill that Mr. Dorrit had troubled the Department by wanting to pay the money, and considered it a grossly informal thing to do after so many years. But, Mr. Tite Barnacle was a buttoned-up man, and consequently a weighty one. All buttoned-up men are weighty. All buttoned-up men are believed in. Whether or no the reserved and never-exercised power of unbuttoning, fascinates mankind; whether or no wisdom is supposed to condense and augment when buttoned up, and to evaporate when unbuttoned; it is certain that the man to whom importance is accorded is the buttoned-up man. Mr. Tite Barnacle never would have passed for half his current value, unless his coat had been always buttoned-up to his white cravat.

"May I ask," said Lord Decimus, "if Mr. Darrit—or Dorrit—has any family?"

Nobody else replying, the host said, "He has two daughters, my lord."

"Oh! You are acquainted with him?" asked Lord Decimus.

"Mrs. Merdle is. Mr. Sparkler is, too. In fact," said Mr. Merdle, "I rather believe that one of the young ladies has made an impression on Edmund Sparkler. He is susceptible, and—I—think—the conquest——" Here Mr. Merdle stopped, and looked at the table-cloth: as he usually did when he found himself observed or listened to.

Bar was uncommonly pleased to find that the Merdle family, and this family, had already been brought into contact. He submitted, in a low voice across the table to Bishop, that it was a kind of analogical illustration of those physical laws, in virtue of which Like flies to Like. He regarded this power of attraction in wealth to draw wealth to it, as something remarkably interesting and curious—something indefinitely allied to the loadstone and gravitation. Bishop, who had ambled back to earth again when the present theme was broached, acquiesced. He said it was indeed highly important to Society that one in the trying situation of unexpectedly finding himself invested with a power for good or for evil in Society, should become, as it were, merged in the superior power of a more legitimate and more gigantic growth, the influence of which (as in the case of our friend, at whose board we sat) was habitually exercised in harmony with the best interests of Society. Thus, instead of two rival and contending flames, a larger and a lesser, each burning with a lurid and uncertain glare, we had a blended and a softened light whose genial ray diffused an equable warmth throughout the land. Bishop seemed to like his own way of putting the case very much, and rather dwelt upon it; Bar, meanwhile (not to throw away a juryman), making a show of sitting at his feet and feeding on his precepts.

The dinner and dessert being three hours' long, the bashful member cooled in the shadow of Lord Decimus faster than he warmed with food and drink, and had but a chilly time of it. Lord Decimus, like a tall tower in a flat country, seemed to project himself across the table-cloth, hide the light from the honorable member, cool the honorable member's marrow, and give him a woeful idea of distance. When he asked this unfortunate traveller to take wine, he encompassed his faltering steps with the gloomiest of shades; and when he said, "Your health, sir!" all around him was barrenness and desolation.

At length Lord Decimus, with a coffee-cup in his hand, began to hover about among the pictures, and to cause an interesting speculation to arise in all minds as to the probabilities of his ceasing to hover, and enabling the smaller birds to flutter up-stairs; which could not be done until he had urged his noble pinions in that direction. After some delay, and several stretches of his wings which came to nothing, he soared to the drawing-rooms.

And here a difficulty arose, which always does arise, when two people are specially brought together at a dinner to confer with one

another. Everybody (except Bishop, who had no suspicion of it) knew perfectly well that this dinner had been eaten and drunk, specifically to the end that Lord Decimus and Mr. Merdle should have five minutes' conversation together. The opportunity so elaborately prepared was now arrived, and it seemed from that moment that no merely human ingenuity could so much as get the two chieftains into the same room. Mr. Merdle and his noble guest persisted in prowling about at opposite ends of the perspective. It was in vain for the engaging Ferdinand to bring Lord Decimus to look at the bronze horses near Mr. Merdle. Then Mr. Merdle evaded, and wandered away. It was in vain for him to bring Mr. Merdle to Lord Decimus to tell him the history of the unique Dresden vases. Then, Lord Decimus evaded and wandered away, while he was getting his man up to the mark.

"Did you ever see such a thing as this?" said Ferdinand to Bar, when he had been baffled twenty times.

"Often," returned Bar.

"Unless I butt one of them into an appointed corner, and you butt the other," said Ferdinand, "it will not come off after all."

"Very good," said Bar. "I'll butt Merdle, if you like; but, not my lord."

Ferdinand laughed, in the midst of his vexation. "Confound them both!" said he, looking at his watch. "I want to get away. Why the deuce can't they come together! They both know what they want and mean to do. Look at them!"

They were still looming at opposite ends of the perspective, each with an absurd pretence of not having the other on his mind, which could not have been more transparently ridiculous though his real mind had been chalked on his back. Bishop, who had just now made a third with Bar and Ferdinand, but whose innocence had again cut him out of the subject and washed him in sweet oil, was seen to approach Lord Decimus and glide into conversation.

"I must get Merdle's doctor to catch and secure him, I suppose," said Ferdinand; "and then I must lay hold of my illustrious kinsman, and decoy him if I can—drag him if I can't—to the conference."

"Since you do me the honor," said Bar, with his slyest smile, "to ask for my poor aid, it shall be yours with the greatest pleasure. I don't think this is to be done by one man. But, if you will undertake to pen my lord into that furthest drawing-room where he is now so profoundly engaged, I will undertake to bring our dear Merdle into the presence, without the possibility of getting away."

"Done!" said Ferdinand. "Done!" said Bar.

Bar was a sight wondrous to behold, and full of matter, when, jauntily waving his double eye-glass by its ribbon, and jauntily drooping to an Universe of Jurymen, he, in the most accidental manner ever seen, found himself at Mr. Merdle's shoulder, and embraced that opportunity of mentioning a little point to him, on which he particularly wished to be guided by the light of his practical knowledge. (Here he took Mr. Merdle's arm and walked him gently away.) A banker, whom we would call A. B. advanced a consider-

able sum of money, which we would call fifteen thousand pounds, to a client or customer of his, whom he would call P. Q. (Here, as they were getting towards Lord Decimus, he held Mr. Merdle tight.) As a security for the repayment of this advance to P. Q. whom we would call a widow lady, there were placed in A. B.'s hands the title deeds of a freehold estate, which we would call Blinkiter Doddles. Now, the point was this. A limited right of felling and lopping in the woods of Blinkiter Doddles, lay in the son of P. Q. then past his majority, and whom we would call X. Y.—but really this was too bad! In the presence of Lord Decimus, to detain the host with chopping our dry chaff of law, was really too bad! Another time! Bar was truly repentant, and would not say another syllable. Would Bishop favor him with half a dozen words? (He had now set Mr. Merdle down on a couch, side by side with Lord Decimus, and to it they must go now, or never.)

And now the rest of the company, highly excited and interested, always excepting Bishop who had not the slightest idea that anything was going on, formed in one group round the fire in the next drawing-room, and pretended to be chatting easily on an infinite variety of small topics, while everybody's thoughts and eyes were secretly straying towards the secluded pair. The Chorus were excessively nervous, perhaps as laboring under the dreadful apprehension that some good thing was going to be diverted from them. Bishop alone talked steadily and evenly. He conversed with the great Physician on that relaxation of the throat with which young curates were too frequently afflicted, and on the means of lessening the great prevalence of that disorder in the church. Physician, as a general rule, was of opinion that the best way to avoid it was to know how to read, before you made a profession of reading. Bishop said dubiously, did he really think so? And Physician said, decidedly, yes he did.

Ferdinand, meanwhile, was the only one of the party who skirmished on the outside of the circle; he kept about midway between it and the two, as if some sort of surgical operation were being performed by Lord Decimus on Mr. Merdle, or by Mr. Merdle on Lord Decimus, and his services might at any moment be required as Dresser. In fact, within a quarter of an hour, Lord Decimus called to him "Ferdinand!" and he went, and took his place in the conference for some five minutes more. Then a half-suppressed gasp broke out among the Chorus; for, Lord Decimus rose to take his leave. Again coaxed up by Ferdinand to the point of making himself popular, he shook hands in the most brilliant manner with the whole company, and even said to Bar "I hope you were not bored by my pearls?" To which Bar retorted "Eton, my lord, or Parliamentary?" neatly showing that he had mastered the joke, and delicately insinuating that he could never forget it while life remained.

All the grave importance that was buttoned up in Mr. Tite Barnacle, took itself away next; and Ferdinand took himself away next, to the opera. Some of the rest lingered a little, marrying golden liqueur glasses to Buhl tables with sticky rings; on the desperate chance of Mr. Merdle's saying something. But, Mr. Merdle, as usual,

oozed sluggishly and muddily about his drawing-room, saying never a word.

In a day or two it was announced to all the town, that Edmund Sparkler, Esquire, son-in-law of the eminent Mr. Merdle of world-wide renown, was made one of the Lords of the Circumlocution Office; and proclamation was issued, to all true believers, that this admirable appointment was to be hailed as a graceful and gracious mark of homage, rendered by the graceful and gracious Decimus, to that commercial interest which must ever in a great commercial country—and all the rest of it, with blast of trumpet. So, bolstered by this mark of Government homage, the wonderful Bank and all the other wonderful undertakings went on and went up; and gapers came to Harley Street, Cavendish Square, only to look at the house where the golden wonder lived.

And when they saw the Chief Butler looking out at the hall-door in his moments of condescension, the gapers said how rich he looked, and wondered how much money he had in the wonderful Bank. But, if they had known that respectable Nemesis better, they would not have wondered about it, and might have stated the amount with the utmost precision.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PROGRESS OF AN EPIDEMIC.

THAT it is at least as difficult to stay a moral infection as a physical one; that such a disease will spread with the malignity and rapidity of the Plague; that the contagion, when it has once made head, will spare no pursuit or condition, but will lay hold on people in the soundest health, and become developed in the most unlikely constitutions; is a fact as firmly established by experience as that we human creatures breathe an atmosphere. A blessing beyond appreciation would be conferred upon mankind, if the tainted, in whose weakness or wickedness these virulent disorders are bred, could be instantly seized and placed in close confinement (not to say summarily smothered) before the poison is communicable.

As a vast fire will fill the air to a great distance with its roar, so the sacred flame which the mighty Barnacles had fanned caused the air to resound more and more, with the name of Merdle. It was deposited on every lip, and carried into every ear. There never was, there never had been, there never again should be, such a man as Mr. Merdle. Nobody, as aforesaid, knew what he had done; but everybody knew him to be the greatest that had appeared.

Down in Bleeding Heart Yard, where there was not one unappropriated halfpenny, as lively an interest was taken in this paragon of men as on the Stock Exchange. Mrs. Plornish, now established in the small grocery and general trade in a snug little shop at the crack

end of the Yard, at the top of the steps, with her little old father and Maggy acting as assistants, habitually held forth about him over the counter, in conversation with her customers. Mr. Plornish, who had a small share in a small builder's business in the neighbourhood, said, trowel in hand, on the tops of scaffolds and on the tiles of houses, that people did tell him as Mr. Merdle was *the* one, mind you, to put us all to rights in respects of that which all on us looked to, and to bring us all safe home as much we needed, mind you, fur toe be brought. Mr. Baptist, sole lodger of Mr. and Mrs. Plornish, was reputed in whispers to lay by the savings which were the result of his simple and moderate life, for investment in one of Mr. Merdle's certain enterprises. The female Bleeding Hearts, when they came for ounces of tea and hundredweights of talk, gave Mrs. Plornish to understand, That how, ma'am, they had heard from their cousin Mary Anne, which worked in the line, that his lady's dresses would fill three waggons. That how she was as handsome a lady, ma'am, as lived, no matter wheres, and a busk like marble itself. That how, according to what they was told, ma'am, it was her son by a former husband as was took into the Government; and a General he had been, and armies he had marched again and victory crowned, if all you heard was to be believed. That how it was reported that Mr. Merdle's words had been, that if they could have made it worth his while to take the whole government he would have took it without a profit, but that take it he could not and stand a loss. That how it was not to be expected, ma'am, that he should lose by it, his ways being, as you might say and utter no falsehood, paved with gold; but that how it was much to be regretted that something handsome hadn't been got up to make it worth his while; for it was such and only such that knowed the heighth to which the bread and butchers' meat had rose, and it was such and only such that both could and would bring that heighth down.

So rife and potent was the fever in Bleeding Heart Yard, that Mr. Pancks's rent-days caused no interval in the patients. The disease took the singular form, on those occasions, of causing the infected to find an unfathomable excuse and consolation in allusions to the magic name.

"Now, then!" Mr. Pancks would say, to a defaulting lodger, "Pay up! Come on!"

"I haven't got it, Mr. Pancks," Defaulter would reply. "I tell you the truth, sir, when I say I haven't got so much as a single sixpence of it to bless myself with."

"This won't do, you know," Mr. Pancks would retort. "You don't expect it *will* do; do you?"

Defaulter would admit, with a low-spirited "No, sir," having no such expectation.

"My proprietor isn't going to stand this, you know," Mr. Pancks would proceed. "He don't send me here for this. Pay up! Come!"

The Defaulter would make answer, "Ah, Mr. Pancks. If I was the rich gentleman whose name is in everybody's mouth—if my name was Merdle, sir—I'd soon pay up, and be glad to do it."

Dialogues on the rent-question usually took place at the house-doors or in the entries, and in the presence of several deeply-interested Bleeding Hearts. They always received a reference of this kind with a low murmur of response, as if it were convincing; and the Defaulter, however blank and discomfited before, always cheered up a little in making it.

"If I was Mr. Merdle, sir, you wouldn't have cause to complain of me then. No, believe me!" the Defaulter would proceed with a shake of the head. "I'd pay up so quick then, Mr. Pancks, that you shouldn't have to ask me."

The response would be heard again here, implying that it was impossible to say anything fairer, and that this was the next thing to paying the money down.

Mr. Pancks would be now reduced to saying as he booked the case, "Well! You'll have the broker in, and be turned out; that's what'll happen to you. It's no use talking to me about Mr. Merdle. You are not Mr. Merdle, any more than I am."

"No, sir," the Defaulter would reply. "I only wish you *were* him, sir."

The response would take this up quickly: replying with great feeling, "Only wish you *were* him, sir."

"You'd be easier with us if you were Mr. Merdle, sir," the Defaulter would go on, with rising spirits, "and it would be better for all parties. Better for our sakes, and better for yours, too. You wouldn't have to worry no one then, sir. You wouldn't have to worry us, and you wouldn't have to worry yourself. You'd be easier in your own mind, sir, and you'd leave others easier, too, you would, if you were Mr. Merdle."

Mr. Pancks, in whom these impersonal compliments produced an irresistible sheepishness, never rallied after such a charge. He could only bite his nails and puff away to the next Defaulter. The responsive Bleeding Hearts would then gather round the Defaulter whom he had just abandoned, and the most extravagant rumours would circulate among them, to their great comfort, touching the amount of Mr. Merdle's ready money.

From one of the many such defeats of one of many rent-days, Mr. Pancks, having finished his day's collection, repaired with his note-book under his arm, to Mrs. Plornish's corner. Mr. Pancks's object was not professional, but social. He had had a trying day, and wanted a little brightening. By this time he was on friendly terms with the Plornish family, having often looked in upon them, at similar seasons, and borne his part in recollections of Miss Dorrit.

Mrs. Plornish's shop-parlor had been decorated under her own eye, and presented, on the side towards the shop, a little fiction in which Mrs. Plornish unspeakably rejoiced. This poetical heightening of the parlor consisted in the wall being painted to represent the exterior of a thatched cottage; the artist having introduced (in as effective a manner as he found compatible with their highly disproportionate dimensions) the real door and window. The modest sun-flower and holly-hock were depicted as flourishing with great luxuriance on this rustic dwelling, while a quantity of dense smoke issuing from the chimney

indicated good cheer within, and also, perhaps, that it had not been lately swept. A faithful dog was represented as flying at the legs of the friendly visitor, from the threshold; and a circular pigeon-house, enveloped in a cloud of pigeons, arose from behind the garden-paling. On the door (when it was shut), appeared the semblance of a brass plate, presenting the inscription, Happy Cottage, T. and M. Plornish; the partnership expressing man and wife. No Poetry and no Art ever charmed the imagination more than the union of the two in this counterfeit cottage charmed Mrs. Plornish. It was nothing to her that Plornish had a habit of leaning against it as he smoked his pipe after work, when his hat blotted out the pigeon-house and all the pigeons, when his back swallowed up the dwelling, when his hands in his pockets without the blooming garden and laid waste the adjacent country. To Mrs. Plornish, it was still a most beautiful cottage, a most wonderful deception; and it made no difference that Mr. Plornish's eye was some inches above the level of the gable bed-room in the thatch. To come out into the shop after it was shut, and hear her father sing a song inside this cottage, was a perfect Pastoral to Mrs. Plornish, the Golden Age revived. And truly if that famous period had been revived, or had ever been at all, it may be doubted whether it would have produced many more heartily admiring daughters than the poor woman.

Warned of a visitor by the tinkling bell at the shop-door, Mrs. Plornish came out of Happy Cottage to see who it might be. "I guessed it was you, Mr. Pancks," said she, "for it's quite your regular night; ain't it? Here's father, you see, come out to serve at the sound of the bell, like a brisk young shopman. Ain't he looking well? Father's more pleased to see you than if you was a customer, for he dearly loves a gossip; and when it turns upon Miss Dorrit, he loves it all the more. You never heard father in such voice as he is in at present," said Mrs. Plornish, her own voice quavering, she was so proud and pleased. "He gave us Strephon last night, to that degree that Plornish gets up and makes him this speech across the table. 'John Edward Nandy,' says Plornish to father, 'I never heard you come the warbles as I have heard you come the warbles this night.' An't it gratifying, Mr. Pancks, though; really?"

Mr. Pancks, who had snorted at the old man in his friendliest manner, replied in the affirmative, and casually asked whether that lively Altro chap had come in yet? Mrs. Plornish answered no, not yet, though he had gone to the West-End with some work, and had said he should be back by tea-time. Mr. Pancks was then hospitably pressed into Happy Cottage, where he encountered the elder Master Plornish just come home from school. Examining that young student, lightly, on the educational proceedings of the day, he found that the more advanced pupils who were in large text and the letter M, had been set the copy, "Merdle, Millions."

"And how are *you* getting on, Mrs. Plornish," said Pancks, "since we're mentioning millions?"

"Very steady indeed, sir," returned Mrs. Plornish. "Father dear, would you go into the shop and tidy the window a little bit before tea, your taste being so beautiful?"

John Edward Nandy trotted away, much gratified, to comply with his daughter's request. Mrs. Plornish, who was always in mortal terror of mentioning pecuniary affairs before the old gentleman, lest any disclosure she made might rouse his spirit and induce him to run away to the workhouse, was thus left free to be confidential with Mr. Pancks.

"It's quite true that the business is very steady indeed," said Mrs. Plornish, lowering her voice; "and has a excellent connection. The only thing that stands in its way, sir, is the Credit."

This drawback, rather severely felt by most people who engaged in commercial transactions with the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard, was a large stumbling-block in Mrs. Plornish's trade. When Mr. Dorrit had established her in the business, the Bleeding Hearts had shown an amount of emotion and a determination to support her in it, that did honor to human nature. Recognising her claim upon their generous feelings as one who had long been a member of their community, they pledged themselves, with great feeling, to deal with Mrs. Plornish, come what would, and bestow their patronage on no other establishment. Influenced by these noble sentiments, they had even gone out of their way to purchase little luxuries in the grocery and butter line to which they were unaccustomed; saying to one another, that if they did stretch a point, was it not for a neighbour and a friend, and for whom ought a point to be stretched if not for such? So stimulated, the business was extremely brisk, and the articles in stock went off with the greatest celerity. In short, if the Bleeding Hearts had but paid, the undertaking would have been a complete success; whereas, by reason of their exclusively confining themselves to owing, the profits actually realised had not yet begun to appear in the books.

Mr. Pancks was making a very porcupine of himself by sticking his hair up, in the contemplation of this state of accounts, when old Mr. Nandy, re-entering the cottage with an air of mystery, entreated them to come and look at the strange behaviour of Mr. Baptist, who seemed to have met with something that had scared him. All three going into the shop, and watching through the window, then saw Mr. Baptist, pale and agitated, go through the following extraordinary performances. First, he was observed hiding at the top of the steps leading down into the Yard, and peeping up and down the street, with his head cautiously thrust out close to the side of the shop door. After very anxious scrutiny, he came out of his retreat, and went briskly down the street as if he were going away altogether; then, suddenly turned about, and went, at the same pace and with the same feint, up the street. He had gone no further up the street than he had gone down, when he crossed the road and disappeared. The object of this last manœuvre was only apparent, when his entering the shop with a sudden twist, from the steps again, explained that he had made a wide and obscure circuit round to the other, or Doyce and Clennam, end of the Yard, and had come through the Yard and bolted in. He was out of breath by that time, as he might well be; and his heart seemed to jerk faster than the little shop-bell, as it quivered and jingled behind him with his hasty shutting of the door.

"Hallo, old chap!" said Mr. Pancks. "Altro, old boy! What's the matter?"

Mr. Baptist, or Signor Cavalletto, understood English now almost as well as Mr. Pancks himself, and could speak it very well too. Nevertheless, Mrs. Plornish, with a pardonable vanity in that accomplishment of hers which made her all but Italian, stepped in as interpreter.

"E ask know," said Mrs. Plornish, "what go wrong?"

"Come into the happy little cottage, Padrona," returned Mr. Baptist, imparting great stealthiness to his flurried back-handed shake of his right forefinger. "Come there!"

Mrs. Plornish was proud of the title Padrona, which she regarded as signifying: not so much Mistress of the house, as Mistress of the Italian tongue. She immediately complied with Mr. Baptist's request, and they all went into the cottage.

"E ope you no fright," said Mrs. Plornish then, interpreting Mr. Pancks in a new way, with her usual fertility of resource. "What appen? Peaka Padrona!"

"I have seen some one," returned Baptist. "I have rincontrato him."

"Im? Oo him?" asked Mrs. Plornish.

"A bad man. A baddest man. I have hoped that I should never see him again."

"Ow you know im bad?" asked Mrs. Plornish.

"It does not matter, Padrona. I know it too well."

"E see you?" asked Mrs. Plornish.

"No. I hope not. I believe not."

"He says," Mrs. Plornish then interpreted, addressing her father and Pancks with mild condescension, "that he has met a bad man, but he hopes the bad man didn't see him.—Why," enquired Mrs. Plornish, reverting to the Italian language, "why ope bad man no see?"

"Padrona, dearest," returned the little foreigner whom she so considerably protected, "do not ask, I pray. Once again, I say it matters not. I have fear of this man. I do not wish to see him, I do not wish to be known of him—never again! Enough, most beautiful. Leave it!"

The topic was so disagreeable to him, and so put his usual liveliness to the rout, that Mrs. Plornish forbore to press him further: the rather as the tea had been drawing for some time on the hob. But she was not the less surprised and curious for asking no more questions; neither was Mr. Pancks, whose expressive breathing had been laboring hard, since the entrance of the little man, like a locomotive engine with a great load getting up a steep incline. Maggy, now better dressed than of yore, though still faithful to the monstrous character of her cap, had been in the back-ground from the first with open mouth and eyes, which staring and gaping features were not diminished in breadth by the untimely suppression of the subject. However, no more was said about it, though much appeared to be thought on all sides: by no means excepting the two young Plornishes, who partook of the evening meal as if their eating the bread and butter were rendered almost superfluous by the painful probability of the worst of men shortly presenting himself for the purpose of eating them. Mr. Baptist, by

degrees, began to chirp a little; but never stirred from the seat he had taken behind the door and close to the window, though it was not his usual place. As often as the little bell rang, he started and peeped out secretly, with the end of the little curtain in his hand, and the rest before his face; evidently not at all satisfied but that the man he dreaded had tracked him through all his doublings and turnings, with the certainty of a terrible bloodhound.

The entrance, at various times, of two or three customers and of Mr. Plornish, gave Mr. Baptist just enough of this employment to keep the attention of the company fixed upon him. Tea was over, and the children were abed, and Mrs. Plornish was feeling her way to the dutiful proposal that her father should favor them with Chloe, when the bell again rang, and Mr. Clennam came in.

Clennam had been poring late over his books and letters; for, the waiting-rooms of the Circumlocution Office ravaged his time sorely. Over and above that, he was depressed and made uneasy by the late occurrence at his mother's. He looked worn and solitary. He felt so, too; but, nevertheless, was returning home from his counting-house by that end of the Yard, to give them the intelligence that he had received another letter from Miss Dorrit.

The news made a sensation in the cottage which drew off the general attention from Mr. Baptist. Maggy, who pushed her way into the foreground immediately, would have seemed to draw in the tidings of her Little Mother, equally at her ears, nose, mouth, and eyes, but that the last were obstructed by tears. She was particularly delighted when Clennam assured her that there were hospitals, and very kindly conducted hospitals, in Rome. Mr. Pancks rose into new distinction in virtue of being specially remembered in the letter. Everybody was pleased and interested, and Clennam was well repaid for his trouble.

"But you are tired, sir. Let me make you a cup of tea," said Mrs. Plornish, "if you'd condescend to take such a thing in the cottage; and many thanks to you, too, I am sure, for bearing us in mind so kindly."

Mr. Plornish deeming it incumbent on him, as host, to add his personal acknowledgments, tendered them in the form which always expressed his highest ideal of a combination of ceremony with sincerity.

"John Edward Nandy," said Mr. Plornish, addressing the old gentleman. "Sir. It's not too often that you see unpretending actions without a spark of pride, and therefore when you see them give grateful honor unto the same, being that if you don't and live to want 'em it follows serve you right."

To which Mr. Nandy replied:

"I am heartily of your opinion, Thomas, and which your opinion is the same as mine, and therefore no more words and not being backwards with that opinion, which opinion giving it as yes, Thomas, yes, is the opinion in which yourself and me must ever be unanimously joined by all, and where there is not difference of opinion there can be none but one opinion, which fully no, Thomas, Thomas, no!"

Arthur, with less formality, expressed himself gratified by their high appreciation of so very slight an attention on his part; and explained

as to the tea that he had not yet dined, and was going straight home to refresh after a long day's labor, or he would have readily accepted the hospitable offer. As Mr. Pancks was somewhat noisily getting his steam up for departure, he concluded by asking that gentleman if he would walk with him? Mr. Pancks said he desired no better engagement, and the two took leave of Happy Cottage.

"If you will come home with me, Pancks," said Arthur, when they got into the street, "and will share what dinner or supper there is, it will be next door to an act of charity; for, I am weary and out of sorts to-night."

"Ask me to do a greater thing than that," said Pancks, "when you want it done, and I'll do it."

Between this eccentric personage and Clennam, a tacit understanding and accord had been always improving since Mr. Pancks flew over Mr. Rugg's back in the Marshalsea Yard. When the carriage drove away on the memorable day of the family's departure, these two had looked after it together, and had walked slowly away together. When the first letter came from Little Dorrit, nobody was more interested in hearing of her than Mr. Pancks. The second letter, at that moment in Clennam's breast-pocket, particularly remembered him by name. Though he had never before made any profession or protestation to Clennam, and though what he had just said was little enough as to the words in which it was expressed, Clennam had long had a growing belief that Mr. Pancks, in his own odd way, was becoming attached to him. All these strings intertwining, made Pancks a very cable of anchorage that night.

"I am quite alone," Arthur explained as they walked on. "My partner is away, busily engaged at a distance on his branch of our business, and you shall do just as you like."

"Thank you. You didn't take particular notice of little Altro just now; did you?" said Pancks.

"No. Why?"

"He's a bright fellow, and I like him," said Pancks. "Something has gone amiss with him to-day. Have you any idea of any cause that can have overset him?"

"You surprise me! None whatever."

Mr. Pancks gave his reasons for the enquiry. Arthur was quite unprepared for them, and quite unable to suggest an explanation of them.

"Perhaps you'll ask him," said Pancks, "as he's a stranger?"

"Ask him what?" returned Clennam.

"What he has on his mind."

"I ought first to see for myself that he has something on his mind, I think," said Clennam. "I have found him in every way so diligent, so grateful (for little enough), and so trustworthy, that it might look like suspecting him. And that would be very unjust."

"True," said Pancks. "But, I say! You oughtn't to be anybody's proprietor, Mr. Clennam. You're much too delicate."

"For the matter of that," returned Clennam laughing, "I have not a large proprietary share in Cavalletto. His carving is his livelihood. He keeps the keys of the Factory, watches it every

alternate night, and acts as a sort of housekeeper to it generally; but, we have little work in the way of his ingenuity, though we give him what we have. No! I am rather his adviser than his proprietor. To call me his standing counsel and his banker would be nearer the fact. Speaking of being his banker, is it not curious, Pancks, that the ventures which run just now in so many people's heads, should run even in little Cavalletto's?"

"Ventures?" retorted Pancks, with a snort. "What ventures?"

"These Merdle enterprises."

"Oh! Investments," said Pancks. "Aye, aye! I didn't know you were speaking of investments."

His quick way of replying caused Clennam to look at him, with a doubt whether he meant more than he said. As it was accompanied, however, with a quickening of his pace and a corresponding increase in the laboring of his machinery, Arthur did not pursue the matter, and they soon arrived at his house.

A dinner of soup and a pigeon-pie, served on a little round table before the fire, and flavored with a bottle of good wine, oiled Mr. Pancks's works in a highly effective manner. So that when Clennam produced his Eastern pipe, and handed Mr. Pancks another Eastern pipe, the latter gentleman was perfectly comfortable.

They puffed for a while in silence, Mr. Pancks like a steam-vessel with wind, tide, calm water, and all other sea-going conditions, in her favor. He was the first to speak, and he spoke thus:

"Yes. Investments is the word."

Clennam, with his former look, said "Ah!"

"I am going back to it, you see," said Pancks.

"Yes. I see you are going back to it," returned Clennam, wondering why.

"Wasn't it a curious thing that they should run in little Altro's head? Eh?" said Pancks as he smoked. "Wasn't that how you put it?"

"That was what I said."

"Aye! But, think of the whole Yard having got it. Think of their all meeting me with it, on my collecting days, here and there and everywhere. Whether they pay, or whether they don't pay. Merdle, Merdle, Merdle. Always Merdle."

"Very strange how these runs on an infatuation prevail," said Arthur.

"An't it?" returned Pancks. After smoking for a minute or so, more dryly than comported with his recent oiling, he added: "Because you see these people don't understand the subject."

"Not a bit," assented Clennam.

"Not a bit," cried Pancks. "Know nothing of figures. Know nothing of money questions. Never made a calculation. Never worked it, sir!"

"If they had——" Clennam was going on to say; when Mr. Pancks, without change of countenance, produced a sound so far surpassing all his usual efforts, nasal or bronchial, that he stopped.

"If they had?" repeated Pancks in an enquiring tone.

"I thought you—spoke," said Arthur, hesitating what name to give the interruption.

"Not at all," said Pancks. "Not yet. I may in a minute. If they had?"

"If they had," observed Clennam, who was a little at a loss how to take his friend, "why, I suppose they would have known better."

"How so, Mr. Clennam?" Pancks asked, quickly, and with an odd effect of having been from the commencement of the conversation loaded with the heavy charge he now fired off. "They're right, you know. They don't mean to be, but they're right."

"Right in sharing Cavalletto's inclination to speculate with Mr. Merdle?"

"Perfectly, sir," said Pancks. "I've gone into it. I've made the calculations. I've worked it. They're safe and genuine." Relieved by having got to this, Mr. Pancks took as long a pull as his lungs would permit at his Eastern pipe, and looked sagaciously and steadily at Clennam while inhaling and exhaling too.

In those moments, Mr. Pancks began to give out the dangerous infection with which he was laden. It is the manner of communicating these diseases; it is the subtle way in which they go about.

"Do you mean, my good Pancks," asked Clennam, emphatically, "that you would put that thousand pounds of yours, let us say, for instance, out at this kind of interest?"

"Certainly," said Pancks. "Already done it, sir."

Mr. Pancks took another long inhalation, another long exhalation, another long sagacious look at Clennam.

"I tell you, Mr. Clennam, I've gone into it," said Pancks. "He's a man of immense resources—enormous capital—government influence. They're the best schemes afloat. They're safe. They're certain."

"Well!" returned Clennam, looking first at him gravely, and then at the fire gravely. "You surprise me!"

"Bah!" Pancks retorted. "Don't say that, sir. It's what you ought to do yourself. Why don't you do as I do?"

Of whom Mr. Pancks had taken the prevalent disease, he could no more have told than if he had unconsciously taken a fever. Bred at first, as many physical diseases are, in the wickedness of men, and then disseminated in their ignorance, these epidemics, after a period, get communicated to many sufferers who are neither ignorant nor wicked. Mr. Pancks might, or might not, have caught the illness himself from a subject of this class; but, in this category he appeared before Clennam, and the infection he threw off was all the more virulent.

"And you have really invested," Clennam had already passed to that word, "your thousand pounds, Pancks?"

"To be sure, sir!" replied Pancks, boldly, with a puff of smoke. "And only wish it was ten!"

Now, Clennam had two subjects lying heavy on his lonely mind that night; the one, his partner's long-deferred hope; the other, what he had seen and heard at his mother's. In the relief of having this companion, and of feeling that he could trust him, he passed on to both,

and both brought him round again, with an increase and acceleration of force, to his point of departure.

It came about in the simplest manner. Quitting the investment subject, after an interval of silent looking at the fire through the smoke of his pipe, he told Pancks how and why he was occupied with the great national Department. "A hard case it has been, and a hard case it is, on Doyce," he finished by saying, with all the honest feeling the topic roused in him.

"Hard indeed," Pancks acquiesced. "But you manage for him, Mr. Clennam?"

"How do you mean?"

"Manage the money part of the business?"

"Yes. As well as I can."

"Manage it better, sir," said Pancks. "Recompense him for his toils and disappointments. Give him the chances of the time. He'll never benefit himself in that way, patient and pre-occupied workman. He looks to you, sir."

"I do my best, Pancks," returned Clennam, uneasily. "As to duly weighing and considering these new enterprises, of which I have had no experience, I doubt if I am fit for it. I am growing old."

"Growing old?" cried Pancks. "Ha, ha!"

There was something so indubitably genuine in the wonderful laugh, and series of snorts and puffs, engendered in Mr. Pancks's astonishment at, and utter rejection of, the idea, that his being quite in earnest could not be questioned.

"Growing old?" cried Pancks. "Hear, hear, hear! Old? Hear him, hear him!"

The positive refusal expressed in Mr. Pancks's continued snorts, no less than in these exclamations, to entertain the sentiment for a single instant, drove Arthur away from it. Indeed, he was fearful of something happening to Mr. Pancks, in the violent conflict that took place between the breath he jerked out of himself and the smoke he jerked into himself. This abandonment of the second topic threw him on the third.

"Young, old, or middle-aged, Pancks," he said, when there was a favorable pause, "I am in a very anxious and uncertain state; a state that even leads me to doubt whether anything now seeming to belong to me, may be really mine. Shall I tell you how this is? Shall I put a great trust in you?"

"You shall, sir," said Pancks, "if you believe me worthy of it."

"I do."

"You may!" Mr. Pancks's short and sharp rejoinder, confirmed by the sudden outstretching of his coally hand, was most expressive and convincing. Arthur shook the hand warmly.

He then, softening the nature of his old apprehensions as much as was possible consistently with their being made intelligible, and never alluding to his mother by name, but speaking vaguely of a relation of his, confided to Mr. Pancks a broad outline of the misgivings he entertained, and of the interview he had witnessed. Mr. Pancks listened with such interest that, regardless of the charms of the Eastern pipe,

he put it in the grate among the fire-irons, and occupied his hands during the whole recital in so erecting the loops and hooks of hair all over his head, that he looked, when it came to a conclusion, like a journeyman Hamlet in conversation with his father's spirit.

"Brings me back, sir," was his exclamation then, with a startling touch on Clennam's knee, "brings me back, sir, to the Investments! I don't say anything of your making yourself poor, to repair a wrong you never committed. That's you. A man must be himself. But, I say this. Fearing you may want money to save your own blood from exposure and disgrace—make as much as you can!"

Arthur shook his head, but looked at him thoughtfully too.

"Be as rich as you can, sir," Pancks adjured him with a powerful concentration of all his energies on the advice. "Be as rich as you honestly can. It's your duty. Not for your sake, but for the sake of others. Take time by the forelock. Poor Mr. Doyce (who really *is* growing old) depends upon you. Your relative depends upon you. You don't know what depends upon you."

"Well, well, well!" returned Arthur. "Enough for to-night."

"One word more, Mr. Clennam," retorted Pancks, "and then enough for to-night. Why should you leave all the gains to the gluttons, knaves, and impostors? Why should you leave all the gains that are to be got, to my proprietor and the like of him? Yet you're always doing it. When I say you, I mean such men as you. You know you are. Why, I see it every day of my life. I see nothing else. It's my business to see it. Therefore I say," urged Pancks, "Go in and win!"

"But what of Go in and lose?" said Arthur.

"Can't be done, sir," returned Pancks. "I have looked into it. Name up, everywhere—immense resources—enormous capital—great position—high connexion—government influence. Can't be done!"

Gradually, after this closing exposition, Mr. Pancks subsided; allowed his hair to droop as much as it ever would droop on the utmost persuasion; reclaimed the pipe from the fire-irons, filled it anew, and smoked it out. They said little more; but were company to one another in silently pursuing the same subjects, and did not part until midnight. On taking his leave, Mr. Pancks, when he had shaken hands with Clennam, worked completely round him before he steamed out at the door. This, Arthur received as an assurance that he might implicitly rely on Pancks, if he should ever come to need assistance; either in any of the matters of which they had spoken that night, or on any other subject that could in any way affect himself.

At intervals all next day, and even while his attention was fixed on other things, he thought of Mr. Pancks's investment of his thousand pounds, and of his having "looked into it." He thought of Mr. Pancks's being so sanguine in this matter, and of his not being usually of a sanguine character. He thought of the great National Department, and of the delight it would be to him to see Doyce better off. He thought of the darkly threatening place that went by the name of Home in his remembrance, and of the gathering shadows which made it yet more darkly threatening than of old. He observed anew that

wherever he went, he saw, or heard, or touched, the celebrated name of Merdle; he found it difficult even to remain at his desk a couple of hours, without having it presented to one of his bodily senses through some agency or other. He began to think it was curious too that it should be everywhere, and that nobody but he should seem to have any mistrust of it. Though indeed he began to remember, when he got to this, even *he* did not mistrust it; he had only happened to keep aloof from it.

Such symptoms, when a disease of the kind is rife, are usually the signs of sickening.

CHAPTER XIV.

TAKING ADVICE.

WHEN it became known to the Britons on the shore of the yellow Tiber, that their intelligent compatriot Mr. Sparkler was made one of the Lords of their Circumlocution Office, they took it as a piece of news with which they had no nearer concern than with any other piece of news—any other Accident or Offence—in the English papers. Some laughed; some said, by way of complete excuse, that the post was virtually a sinecure, and any fool who could spell his name was good enough for it; some, and these were the more solemn political oracles, said that Decimus did wisely to strengthen himself, and that the sole constitutional purpose of all places within the gift of Decimus, was, that Decimus should strengthen himself. A few bilious Britons there were who would not subscribe to this article of faith; but their objection was purely theoretical. In a practical point of view, they listlessly abandoned the matter, as being the business of some other Britons unknown, somewhere, or nowhere. In like manner, at home, great numbers of Britons maintained, for as long as four and twenty consecutive hours, that those invisible and anonymous Britons “ought to take it up;” and that if they quietly acquiesced in it, they deserved it. But of what class the remiss Britons were composed, and where the unlucky creatures hid themselves, and why they hid themselves, and how it constantly happened that they neglected their interests, when so many other Britons were quite at a loss to account for their not looking after those interests, was not, either upon the shore of the yellow Tiber or the shore of the black Thames, made apparent to men.

Mrs. Merdle circulated the news, as she received congratulations on it, with a careless grace that displayed it to advantage, as the setting displays the jewel. Yes, she said, Edmund had taken the place. Mr. Merdle wished him to take it, and he had taken it. She hoped Edmund might like it, but really she didn't know. It would keep him in town a good deal, and he preferred the country. Still, it was not a disagreeable position—and it was a position. There was no

denying that the thing was a compliment to Mr. Merdle, and was not a bad thing for Edmund if he liked it. It was just as well that he should have something to do, and it was just as well that he should have something for doing it. Whether it would be more agreeable to Edmund than the army, remained to be seen.

Thus the bosom; accomplished in the art of seeming to make things of small account, and really enhancing them in the process. While Henry Gowan, whom Decimus had thrown away, went through the whole round of his acquaintance between the Gate of the People and the town of Albano, vowing, almost (but not quite) with tears in his eyes, that Sparkler was the sweetest-tempered, simplest-hearted, altogether most loveable jackass that ever grazed on the public common; and that only one circumstance could have delighted him (Gowan) more, than his (the beloved jackass's) getting this post, and that would have been his (Gowan's) getting it himself. He said, it was the very thing for Sparkler. There was nothing to do, and he would do it charmingly; there was a handsome salary to draw, and he would draw it charmingly; it was a delightful, appropriate, capital appointment; and he almost forgave the donor his slight of himself, in his joy that the dear donkey for whom he had so great an affection was so admirably stabled. Nor did his benevolence stop here. He took pains, on all social occasions, to draw Mr. Sparkler out, and make him conspicuous before the company; and, although the considerate action always resulted in that young gentleman's making a dreary and forlorn mental spectacle of himself, the friendly intention was not to be doubted.

Unless, indeed, it chanced to be doubted by the object of Mr. Sparkler's affections. Miss Fanny was now in the difficult situation of being universally known in that light, and of not having dismissed Mr. Sparkler, however capriciously she used him. Hence, she was sufficiently identified with the gentleman to feel compromised by his being more than usually ridiculous; and hence, being by no means deficient in quickness, she sometimes came to his rescue against Gowan and did him very good service. But, while doing this, she was ashamed of him, undetermined whether to get rid of him or more decidedly encourage him, distracted with apprehensions that she was every day becoming more and more immeshed in her uncertainties, and tortured by misgivings that Mrs. Merdle triumphed in her distress. With this tumult in her mind, it is no subject for surprise that Miss Fanny came home one night in a state of agitation from a concert and ball at Mrs. Merdle's house, and, on her sister affectionately trying to soothe her, pushed that sister away from the toilette-table at which she sat angrily trying to cry, and declared with a heaving bosom that she detested everybody, and she wished she was dead.

"Dear Fanny, what is the matter? Tell me."

"Matter, your little Mole," said Fanny. "If you were not the blindest of the blind, you would have no occasion to ask me. The idea of daring to pretend to assert that you have eyes in your head, and yet ask me what's the matter!"

"Is it Mr. Sparkler, dear?"

"Mis-ter Spar-kler!" repeated Fanny, with unbounded scorn, as if

he were the last subject in the Solar system that could possibly be near her mind. "No, Miss Bat, it is not."

Immediately afterwards, she became remorseful for having called her sister names; declaring with sobs that she knew she made herself hateful, but that everybody drove her to it.

"I don't think you are well to-night, dear Fanny."

"Stuff and nonsense!" replied the young lady, turning angry again; "I am as well as you are. Perhaps I might say, better, and yet make no boast of it."

Poor Little Dorrit, not seeing her way to the offering of any soothing words that would escape repudiation, deemed it best to remain quiet. At first, Fanny took this ill, too; protesting to her looking-glass, that of all the trying sisters a girl could have, she did think the most trying sister was a flat sister. That she knew she was at times a wretched temper; that she knew she made herself hateful; that when she made herself hateful, nothing would do her half the good of being told so; but that, being afflicted with a flat sister, she never *was* told so, and the consequence resulted that she was absolutely tempted and goaded into making herself disagreeable. Besides (she angrily told her looking-glass), she didn't want to be forgiven. It was not a right example, that she should be constantly stooping to be forgiven by a younger sister. And this was the Art of it—that she was always being placed in the position of being forgiven, whether she liked it or not. Finally she burst into violent weeping, and, when her sister came and sat close at her side to comfort her, said, "Amy, you're an Angel!"

"But, I tell you what, my Pet," said Fanny, when her sister's gentleness had calmed her, "it now comes to this; that things cannot and shall not go on as they are at present going on, and that there must be an end of this, one way or other."

As the announcement was vague, though very peremptory, Little Dorrit returned, "Let us talk about it."

"Quite so, my dear," assented Fanny, as she dried her eyes. "Let us talk about it. I am rational again now, and you shall advise me, *Will* you advise me, my sweet child?"

Even Amy smiled at the notion, but she said, "I will, Fanny, as well as I can."

"Thank you, dearest Amy," returned Fanny, kissing her. "You are my Anchor."

Having embraced her Anchor with great affection, Fanny took a bottle of sweet toilette water from the table, and called to her maid for a fine handkerchief. She then dismissed that attendant for the night, and went on to be advised; dabbing her eyes and forehead from time to time, to cool them.

"My love," Fanny began, "our characters and points of view are sufficiently different (kiss me again, my darling), to make it very probable that I shall surprise you by what I am going to say. What I am going to say, my dear, is, that notwithstanding our property, we labor, socially speaking, under disadvantages. You don't quite understand what I mean, Amy?"

"I have no doubt I shall," said Amy, mildly, "after a few words more."

"Well, my dear, what I mean, is, that we are, after all, new comers into fashionable life."

"I am sure, Fanny," Little Dorrit interposed in her zealous admiration, "no one need find that out in you."

"Well, my dear child, perhaps not," said Fanny, "though it's most kind and most affectionate in you, you precious girl, to say so." Here she dabbed her sister's forehead, and blew upon it a little. "But, you are," resumed Fanny, "as is well known, the dearest little thing that ever was! To resume, my child. Pa is extremely gentlemanly and extremely well informed, but he is, in some trifling respects, a little different from other gentlemen of his fortune: partly on account of what he has gone through, poor dear: partly, I fancy, on account of its often running in his mind that other people are thinking about that, while he is talking to them. Uncle, my love, is altogether unpresentable. Though a dear creature to whom I am tenderly attached, he is, socially speaking, shocking. Edward is frightfully expensive and dissipated. I don't mean that there is anything ungenteeled in that itself—far from it—but I do mean that he doesn't do it well, and that he doesn't, if I may so express myself, get the money's-worth in the sort of dissipated reputation that attaches to him."

"Poor Edward!" sighed Little Dorrit, with the whole family history in the sigh.

"Yes. And poor you and me too," returned Fanny, rather sharply. "Very true! Then, my dear, we have no mother, and we have a Mrs. General. And I tell you again, darling, that Mrs. General, if I may reverse a common proverb and adapt it to her, is a cat in gloves who *will* catch mice. That woman, I am quite sure and confident, will be our mother-in-law."

"I can hardly think, Fanny——" Fanny stopped her.

"Now, don't argue with me about it, Amy," said she, "because I know better." Feeling that she had been sharp again, she dabbed her sister's forehead again, and blew upon it again. "To resume once more, my dear. It then becomes a question with me (I am proud and spirited, Amy, as you very well know: too much so, I daresay) whether I shall make up my mind to take it upon myself to carry the family through."

"How?" asked her sister, anxiously.

"I will not," said Fanny, without answering the question, "submit to be mother-in-lawed by Mrs. General; and I will not submit to be, in any respect whatever, either patronised or tormented by Mrs. Merdle."

Little Dorrit laid her hand upon the hand that held the bottle of sweet water, with a still more anxious look. Fanny, quite punishing her own forehead with the vehement dabs she now began to give it, fitfully went on.

"That he has, somehow or other, and how is of no consequence, attained a very good position, no one can deny. That it is a very good connexion, no one can deny. And as to the question of clever or not clever, I doubt very much whether a clever husband would be suitable to me. I cannot submit. I should not be able to defer to him enough."

"O, my dear, Fanny!" expostulated Little Dorrit, upon whom a kind of terror had been stealing as she perceived what her sister meant. "If you loved any one, all this feeling would change. If you loved any one, you would no more be yourself, but you would quite lose and forget yourself in your devotion to him. If you loved him, Fanny——" Fanny had stopped the dabbling hand, and was looking at her fixedly.

"O, indeed!" cried Fanny. "Really? Bless me, how much some people know of some subjects! They say every one has a subject, and I certainly seem to have hit upon yours, Amy. There, you little thing, I was only in fun," dabbling her sister's forehead; "but, don't you be a silly puss, and don't you think flightily and eloquently about degenerate impossibilities. There! Now, I'll go back to myself."

"Dear Fanny, let me say first, that I would far rather we worked for a scanty living again, than I would see you rich and married to Mr. Sparkler."

"Let you say, my dear?" retorted Fanny. "Why, of course, I will let you say anything. There is no constraint upon you, I hope. We are together to talk it over. And as to marrying Mr. Sparkler, I have not the least intention of doing so to-night, my dear, or to-morrow morning either."

"But at some time?"

"At no time, for anything I know at present," answered Fanny, with indifference. Then, suddenly changing her indifference into a burning restlessness, she added, "You talk about the clever men, you little thing! It's all very fine and easy to talk about the clever men; but where are they? I don't see them anywhere near me!"

"My dear Fanny, so short a time——"

"Short time or long time," interrupted Fanny, "I am impatient of our situation, I don't like our situation, and very little would induce me to change it. Other girls, differently reared and differently circumstanced altogether, might wonder at what I say or may do. Let them. They are driven by their lives and characters; I am driven by mine."

"Fanny, my dear Fanny, you know that you have qualities to make you the wife of one very superior to Mr. Sparkler."

"Amy, my dear Amy," retorted Fanny, parodying her words, "I know that I wish to have a more defined and distinct position, in which I can assert myself with greater effect against that insolent woman."

"Would you therefore—forgive my asking, Fanny—therefore marry her son?"

"Why, perhaps," said Fanny, with a triumphant smile. "There may be many less promising ways of arriving at an end than that, my dear. That piece of insolence may think, now, that it would be a great success to get her son off upon me, and shelve me. But, perhaps she little thinks how I would retort upon her if I married her son. I would oppose her in everything, and compete with her. I would make it the business of my life."

Fanny set down the bottle when she came to this, and walked about the room; always stopping and standing still while she spoke.

"One thing I could certainly do, my child: I could make her older. And I would!"

This was followed by another walk.

"I would talk of her as an old woman. I would pretend to know—if I didn't, but I should from her son—all about her age. And she should hear me say, Amy: affectionately, quite dutifully and affectionately: how well she looked, considering her time of life. I could make her seem older, at once, by being myself so much younger. I may not be as handsome as she is; I am not a fair judge of that question, I suppose; but, I know I am handsome enough to be a thorn in her side. And I would be!"

"My dear sister, would you condemn yourself to an unhappy life for this?"

"It wouldn't be an unhappy life, Amy. It would be the life I am fitted for. Whether by disposition, or whether by circumstances, is no matter; I am better fitted for such a life than for almost any other."

There was something of a desolate tone in those words; but, with a short proud laugh she took another walk, and after passing a great looking-glass came to another stop.

"Figure! Figure, Amy! Well. The woman has a good figure. I will give her her due, and not deny it. But, is it so far beyond all others that it is altogether unapproachable? Upon my word, I am not so sure of it. Give some much younger women the latitude as to dress that she has, being married; and we would see about that, my dear!"

Something in the thought that was agreeable and flattering, brought her back to her seat in a gayer temper. She took her sister's hands in hers, and clapped all four hands above her head as she looked in her sister's face laughing:

"And the dancer, Amy, that she has quite forgotten—the dancer who bore no sort of resemblance to me, and of whom I never remind her, oh dear no!—should dance through her life, and dance in her way, to such a tune as would disturb her insolent placidity a little. Just a little, my dear Amy, just a little!"

Meeting an earnest and imploring look in Amy's face, she brought the four hands down, and laid only one on Amy's lips.

"Now, don't argue with me, child," she said in a sterner way, "because it is of no use. I understand these subjects much better than you do. I have not nearly made up my mind, but it may be. Now we have talked this over comfortably, and may go to bed. You best and dearest little mouse, Good Night!" With those words Fanny weighed her Anchor, and—having taken so much advice—left off being advised for that occasion.

Thenceforward, Amy observed Mr. Sparkler's treatment by his enslaver, with new reasons for attaching importance to all that passed between them. There were times when Fanny appeared quite unable to endure his mental feebleness, and when she became so sharply impatient of it that she would all but dismiss him for good. There were other times when she got on much better with him; when he amused her, and when her sense of superiority seemed to counterbalance that opposite side of the scale. If Mr. Sparkler had been

other than the faithfullest and most submissive of swains, he was sufficiently hard pressed to have fled from the scene of his trials, and have set at least the whole distance from Rome to London between himself and his enchantress. But, he had no greater will of his own than a boat has when it is towed by a steam-ship; and he followed his cruel mistress through rough and smooth, on equally strong compulsion.

Mrs. Merdle, during these passages, said little to Fanny, but said more about her. She was, as it were, forced to look at her, through her eye-glass, and in general conversation to allow commendations of her beauty to be wrung from her by its irresistible demands. The defiant character it assumed when Fanny heard these extollings (as it generally happened that she did), was not expressive of concessions to the impartial bosom; but, the utmost revenge the bosom took was, to say audibly, "a spoilt beauty—but with that face and shape, who could wonder?"

It might have been about a month or six weeks after the night of the advice, when Little Dorrit began to think she detected some new understanding between Mr. Sparkler and Fanny. Mr. Sparkler, as if in adherence to some compact, scarcely ever spoke without first looking towards Fanny, for leave. That young lady was too discreet ever to look back again: but, if Mr. Sparkler had permission to speak, she remained silent; if he had not, she herself spoke. Moreover, it became plain whenever Henry Gowan attempted to perform the friendly office of drawing him out, that he was not to be drawn. And not only that, but Fanny would presently, without any pointed application in the world, chance to say something with such a sting in it, that Gowan would draw back as if he had put his hand into a bee-hive.

There was yet another circumstance which went a long way to confirm Little Dorrit in her fears, though it was not a great circumstance in itself. Mr. Sparkler's demeanour towards herself, changed. It became fraternal. Sometimes, when she was in the outer circle of assemblies—at their own residence, at Mrs. Merdle's, or elsewhere—she would find herself stealthily supported round the waist by Mr. Sparkler's arm. Mr. Sparkler never offered the slightest explanation of this attention; but merely smiled with an air of blundering, contented, good-natured proprietorship, which, in so heavy a gentleman, was ominously expressive.

Little Dorrit was at home one day, thinking about Fanny with a heavy heart. They had a room at one end of their drawing-room suite, nearly all irregular bay-window, projecting over the street, and commanding all the picturesque life and variety of the Corso, both up and down. At three or four o'clock in the afternoon, English time, the view from this window was very bright and peculiar; and Little Dorrit used to sit and muse here, much as she had been used to wile away the time in her balcony at Venice. Seated thus one day, she was softly touched on the shoulder, and Fanny said, "Well, Amy dear," and took her seat at her side. Their seat was a part of the window; when there was anything in the way of a procession going on, they used to have bright draperies hung out at the window, and used to

kneel or sit on this seat and look out at it, leaning on the brilliant color. But there was no procession that day, and Little Dorrit was rather surprised by Fanny's being at home at that hour, as she was generally out on horseback then.

"Well, Amy," said Fanny, "what are you thinking of, little one?"

"I was thinking of you, Fanny."

"No? What a coincidence! I declare here's some one else. You were not thinking of this some one else too; were you, Amy?"

Amy *had* been thinking of this some one else too; for, it was Mr. Sparkler. She did not say so, however, as she gave him her hand. Mr. Sparkler came and sat down on the other side of her, and she felt the fraternal railing come behind her, and apparently stretch on to include Fanny.

"Well, my little sister," said Fanny, with a sigh, "I suppose you know what this means?"

"She's as beautiful as she's doated on," stammered Mr. Sparkler—"and there's no nonsense about her—it's arranged——"

"You needn't explain, Edmund," said Fanny.

"No, my love," said Mr. Sparkler.

"In short, pet," proceeded Fanny, "on the whole, we are engaged. We must tell papa about it, either to-night or to-morrow, according to the opportunities. Then it's done, and very little more need be said."

"My dear Fanny," said Mr. Sparkler, with deference, "I should like to say a word to Amy."

"Well, well! Say it, for goodness sake," returned the young lady.

"I am convinced, my dear Amy," said Mr. Sparkler, "that if ever there was a girl, next to your highly-endowed and beautiful sister, who had no nonsense about her——"

"We know all about that, Edmund," interposed Miss Fanny. "Never mind that. Pray go on to something else besides our having no nonsense about us."

"Yes, my love," said Mr. Sparkler. "And I assure you, Amy, that nothing can be a greater happiness to myself, myself—next to the happiness of being so highly honored with the choice of a glorious girl who hasn't an atom of——"

"Pray, Edmund, pray!" interrupted Fanny, with a slight pat of her pretty foot upon the floor.

"My love, you're quite right," said Mr. Sparkler, "and I know I have a habit of it. What I wished to declare was, that nothing can be a greater happiness to myself, myself—next to the happiness of being united to pre-eminently the most glorious of girls—than to have the happiness of cultivating the affectionate acquaintance of Amy. I may not myself," said Mr. Sparkler manfully, "be up to the mark on some other subjects at a short notice, and I am aware that if you were to poll Society the general opinion would be that I am not; but on the subject of Amy, I AM up to the mark!"

Mr. Sparkler kissed her, in witness thereof.

"A knife and fork and an apartment," proceeded Mr. Sparkler,

growing, in comparison with his oratorical antecedents, quite diffuse, "will ever be at Amy's disposal. My Governor, I am sure, will always be proud to entertain one whom I so much esteem. And regarding my mother," said Mr. Sparkler, "who is a remarkably fine woman, with——"

"Edmund, Edmund!" cried Miss Fanny, as before.

"With submission, my soul," pleaded Mr. Sparkler. "I know I have a habit of it, and I thank you very much, my adorable girl, for taking the trouble to correct it; but my mother is admitted on all sides to be a remarkably fine woman, and she really hasn't any."

"That may be, or may not be," returned Fanny, "but pray don't mention it any more."

"I will not, my love," said Mr. Sparkler.

"Then in fact you have nothing more to say, Edmund; have you?" enquired Fanny.

"So far from it, my adorable girl," answered Mr. Sparkler, "I apologise for having said so much."

Mr. Sparkler perceived, by a kind of inspiration, that the question implied had he not better go? He therefore withdrew the fraternal railing, and neatly said that he thought he would, with submission, take his leave. He did not go without being congratulated by Amy, as well as she could discharge that office in the flutter and distress of her spirits.

When he was gone, she said, "O, Fanny, Fanny!" and turned to her sister in the bright window, and fell upon her bosom and cried there. Fanny laughed at first; but soon laid her face against her sister's and cried too—a little. It was the last time Fanny ever showed that there was any hidden, suppressed, or conquered feeling in her on that matter. From that hour, the way she had chosen lay before her, and she trod it with her own imperious self-willed step.

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DR. DE JONGH, an eminent Dutch physician, has, as is well known, devoted himself for upwards of sixteen years to a series of scientific researches into the nature and properties of Cod Liver Oil. His works, recording these investigations, have been translated into most of the European languages; by universal admission, they are regarded by the Faculty as the standard authority upon the subject; and in addition to the spontaneous approval and highly flattering testimonials from some of the most distinguished medical men and scientific chemists in Europe, they have been rewarded by his Majesty LEOPOLD I., the King of the Belgians, conferring the dignity of a Knight of the Order of Leopold, and the large Gold Medal of Merit, and by his Majesty WILLIAM II., the King of the Netherlands, with a Silver Medal specially struck for the purpose.

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Brown Fish Oils, prepared solely for manufacturing or household purposes, can be and are very profitably offered and supplied at a low rate of charge, although their total unfitness for medical use not only leads to serious disappointment or injury, but tends to detract from the high and general reputation of a remedy, when genuine, of acknowledged and inestimable value. Where this discreditable course is pursued, purchasers are earnestly requested to resort to another establishment, or to apply directly to Dr. de Jongh's Agents in London.



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THE following are selected from some of the leading Testimonials in commendation of DR. DE JONGH'S Light Brown Cod Liver Oil:—

THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR OF HOLLAND.

"I have the honour of bringing to your knowledge that it has pleased the King to grant you, by his decree of the 20th January, 1848, No. 101, a silver medal with an appropriate honorary inscription, as a testimony of His Majesty's high approbation of your efforts in securing to this country a supply of the most efficacious Cod Liver Oil from Norway. I have given the necessary orders for the execution of this medal.

"To Dr. de Jongh, at the Hague."

(Signed)

"VAN DER HEIM.

THE INTENDANT OF THE CIVIL LIST OF BELGIUM.

"Sir—The King has charged me to return you his very particular thanks for the homage done to him, by the presentation of your most valuable researches concerning the Cod Liver Oil. As an expression of his utmost satisfaction, His Majesty has given me the order of presenting you with the accompanying large gold medal.

"Brussels, Oct. 6, 1847.
"To Dr. de Jongh, at the Hague."

"I remain, with the highest regard, &c.
"The Intendant of the Civil List,

(Signed)

"CONWE.

THE ROYAL SANITARY POLICE OF PRUSSIA.

"In answer to your letter of the 2nd ult., requesting permission to sell DR. DE JONGH'S God Liver Oil in bottles, accompanied by his stamp and signature, the Royal Police of Prussia (Königliches-polizei-Præsidium) has the honour of informing you that it has caused the Oil to be submitted to an official investigation, and that the result of such investigation has proved it to be not only the genuine Cod Liver Oil, but, still further, that it is of a kind which distinguishes itself from the Cod Liver Oil in ordinary use, alike by its taste and chemical composition. Considering, moreover, that it has come to their knowledge that physicians generally recommend the use of Dr. DE JONGH'S Oil in preference to the Cod Liver Oil in ordinary use, the Royal Police accedes to your request.

"Berlin, Jan. 23, 1851.

"To A. M. Blume, Chemist, Berlin."

"KONIGLICHES POLIZEI-PRÆSIDIUM.

"lo Abtheilung.

The late JONATHAN PEREIRA, M.D., F.R.S.E., F.L.S.,

Professor at the University of London, Author of "THE ELEMENTS OF MATERIA MEDICA AND THERAPEUTICS," &c., &c.

"My dear Sir,—I was very glad to find from you, when I had the pleasure of seeing you in London, that you were interested commercially in Cod Liver Oil. It was fitting that the Author of the best analysis and investigations into the properties of this Oil should himself be the Purveyor of this important medicine.

"I feel, however, some diffidence in venturing to fulfil your request, by giving you my opinion of the quality of the Oil of which you gave me a sample; because I know that no one can be better, and few so well, acquainted with the physical and chemical properties of this medicine as yourself, whom I regard as the highest authority on the subject.

"I can, however, have no hesitation about the propriety of responding to your application. The Oil which you gave me was of the very finest quality, whether considered with reference to its colour, flavour, or chemical properties; and I am satisfied that for medicinal purposes no finer Oil can be procured.

"With my best wishes for your success, believe me, my dear Sir, to be very faithfully yours,

"To Dr. de Jongh."

(Signed)

"JONATHAN PEREIRA.

"Finsbury Square, London April 16, 1851.

ARTHUR HILL HASSALL, ESQ., M.D., F.L.S.

Member of the Royal College of Physicians, Physician to the Royal Free Hospital, Chief Analyst of the Sanitary Commission of the "Lancet," Author of "FOOD, AND ITS ADULTERATIONS," &c., &c.

"Dear Sir,—I beg to return my acknowledgments for the copy of your Work on Cod Liver Oil, with which you have favoured me. I was already acquainted with it, and had perused it sometime previously with considerable gratification, especially the chapter devoted to the consideration of the adulteration of Cod Liver Oil.

"I have paid, as you are aware, much attention to the subject of the adulteration of drugs. Amongst the articles examined, I have not overlooked one so important as Cod Liver Oil; and this more particularly, since it is a very favourite remedy with me, and is, moreover, so liable to deterioration by admixture with other, especially inferior, Fish Oils. I may state that I have more than once, at different times, subjected your Light Brown Oil to chemical analysis—and this unknown to yourself—and I have always found it to be free from all impurity, and rich in the constituents of bile.

"So great is my confidence in the article, that I usually prescribe it in preference to any other, in order to make sure of obtaining the remedy in its purest and best condition.—I remain, yours faithfully,

"To Dr. de Jongh, the Hague."

(Signed)

"ARTHUR H. HASSALL, M.D.

"Bennett Street, St. James's Street, Dec. 1, 1854.

Dr. LETHEY,

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(Signed)

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"College Laboratory, London Hospital, Sept. 24, 1855.

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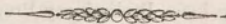
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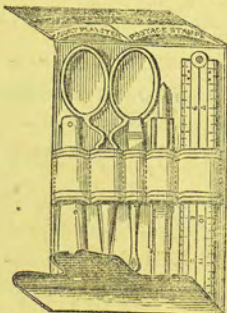
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March 12, WEDNESDAY. November 29, MONDAY. 1857.

	Sund.	Tues.	Wed.	Thur.	Frid.	Satur.
JAN. 1	4	5	6	7	8	9
JAN. 2	5	6	7	8	9	10
JAN. 3	6	7	8	9	10	11

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The Royal Insurance Company.

The City Article of the LONDON TIMES, of the 24th July last, states that the transactions of the Royal Insurance Company "appear to have been of a perfectly satisfactory character." It includes the following statements confirmatory of that opinion:—

PREMIUMS.

The Premiums of Nine Offices enumerated are stated to be .. £324,924
Of which the Royal alone amount to..... 371,957
being 82 per cent. of the accumulated Premiums of the remaining Eight Companies.

EXPENDITURE.

The expenditure of Insurance Companies is, at present, attracting the anxious attention of the Public. The statement of "The Times," has elicited the following remarks from a contemporary:—"Here, again, the Royal Insurance Company occupies a position of honourable pre-eminence; for while its expenses of management, spread over a period of three years, *have been less than 20 per cent.*, those of five other offices, extending over an equal time—for we omit those which have been established within three years, or we might make a much stronger case—have varied from 22 to 74 per cent., and in one case have been as high as 111 per cent. on the receipts.

RESOURCES.

In like manner, the entire Funds in hand of thirteen offices is quoted, in "The Times," at £1,238,688, including the Royal, which alone is £372,394, and which is, therefore, equal to 43 per Cent. of the accumulated funds of the remaining twelve offices; or, to make the VAST RESOURCES of the Company still more manifest, it may be stated that, putting aside the three largest offices named, (the funds of the greatest of which barely exceed *one-half* of those of the "Royal") *the united funds of the remaining ten offices do not equal the funds of this Company.*

The favourable position in which this Company is placed in "The Times" article, would have been even more prominently shown if the experience of other years than those taken had been selected.

As an instance, the following is the result taken from the accounts of the Company for the year 1855:—

Fire Premiums and other Receipts, not including Life	£149,812	13	7
Losses, Expenses, and Dividend	131,684	13	8
Balance as a Reserve from one year's transactions alone	18,127	19	11
Funds in hand, without including ample Reserve for Life Liabilities..Upwards of	400,000	0	0

L I F E

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on ages from Twenty to Forty, 80 per cent. on the premium.

PERIODS OF DIVISION—EVERY FIVE YEARS.

The accumulated Expenditure of 54 Life Offices enumerated by The Times of 12th August last, compared with their amount of Premium and Interest, is stated to be 61 per cent. The Expenditure of the Royal Insurance Company is only.....13 per cent.

Percy M. Dove,

ACTUARY AND MANAGER.

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- BOTANY—AS ADAPTED TO THE ARTS AND ART-MANUFACTURES, will be the title of a continuous Article by CHRISTOPHER DRESSER, Esq., Lecturer on Botany. The Illustrations to this subject will be numerous.
- ART-MANUFACTURE—AS ASSISTED BY IMPROVED MACHINERY, will be treated of by PROFESSOR HUNT, of the Museum of Economic Geology. Descriptions and Engravings of the Progress of Art-Manufacture will also be continued, selecting such productions as are alike honourable to the producer and instructive to the public.
- BRITISH ARTISTS: THEIR STYLE AND CHARACTER.—These Articles, which have for some time constituted a feature in the ART-JOURNAL, will be continued monthly, with engraved Illustrations.
- PICTURES IN THE ROYAL COLLECTION.—The following will probably appear during the year:—

K. GEORGE IV. ENTERING HOLYROOD PALACE... Wilkie	MARZOZZETTES..... Sir E. Landseer
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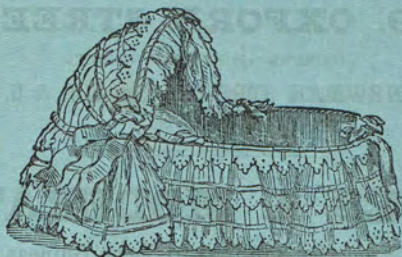
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