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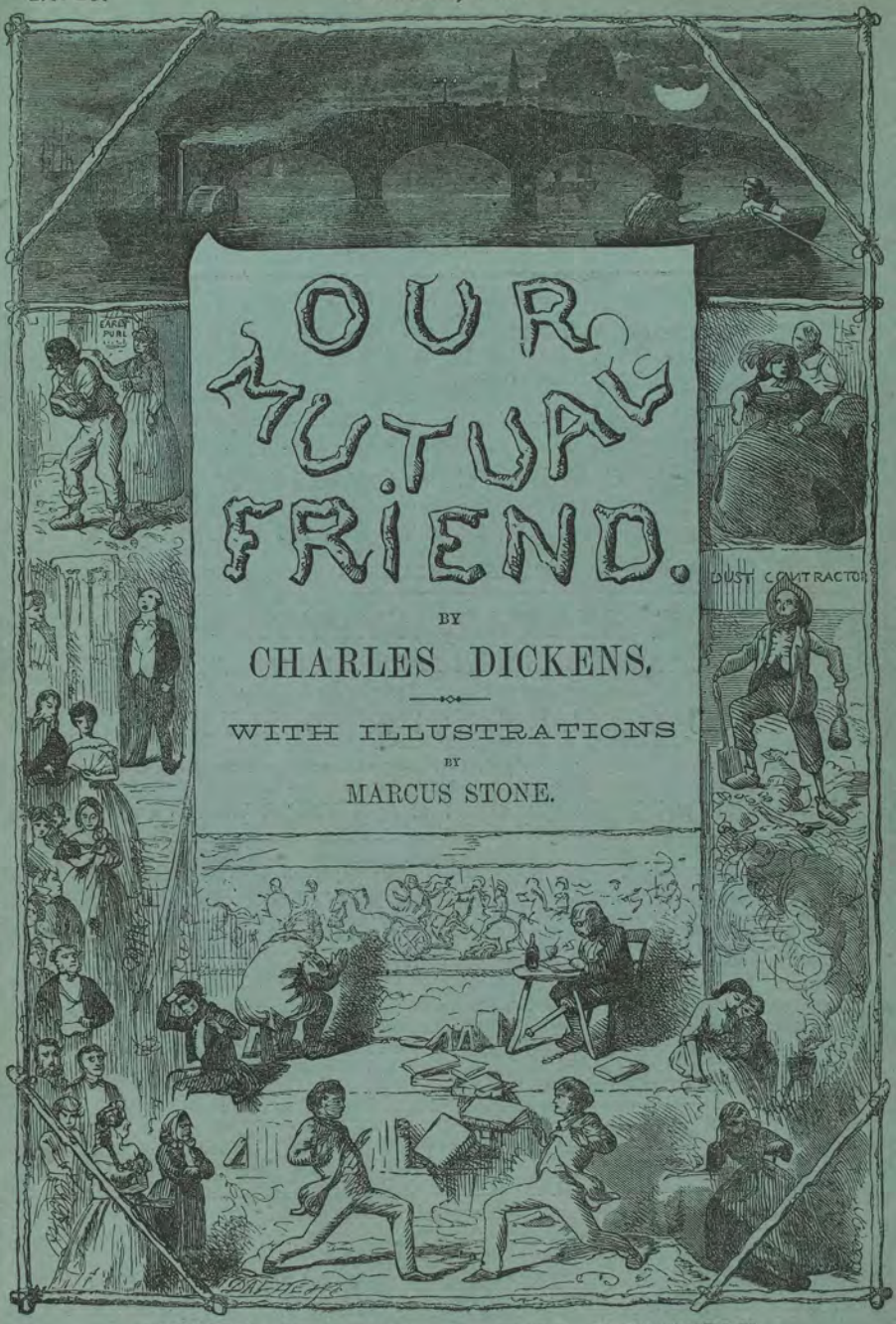

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BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

MARCUS STONE.

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6 Egg Spoons, gilt bowls	10 0	12 0	12 0	13 6
2 Sauce Ladles	6 0	8 0	8 0	9 0
1 Gravy Spoon	6 6	9 0	10 0	11 0
2 Salt Spoons, gilt bowls	3 4	4 0	4 0	4 6
1 Mustard Spoon, gilt bowl	1 8	2 0	2 0	2 3
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IN THE LOCK-KEEPER'S HOUSE.

THE WEDDING DINNER AT GREENWICH.

Book the Fourth. A Turning.

CHAPTER I.

SETTING TRAPS.

Plashwater Weir-Mill Lock looked tranquil and pretty on an evening in the summer time. A soft air stirred the leaves of the fresh green trees, and passed like a smooth shadow over the river, and like a smoother shadow over the yielding grass. The voice of the falling water, like the voices of the sea and the wind, were as an outer memory to a contemplative listener; but not particularly so to Mr. Riderhood, who sat on one of the blunt wooden levers of his lock-gates, dozing. Wine must be got into a butt by some agency before it can be drawn out; and the wine of sentiment never having been got into Mr. Riderhood by any agency, nothing in nature tapped him.

As the Rogue sat, ever and again nodding himself off his balance, his recovery was always attended by an angry stare and growl, as if, in the absence of any one else, he had aggressive inclinations towards himself. In one of these starts the cry of "Lock, ho! Lock!" prevented his relapse into a doze. Shaking himself as he got up, like the surly brute he was, he gave his growl a responsive twist at the end, and turned his face down-stream to see who hailed.

It was an amateur-sculler, well up to his work though taking it easily, in so light a boat that the Rogue remarked: "A little less on you, and you'd a'most ha' been a Wagerbut;" then went to work at his windlass handles and sluices, to let the sculler in. As the latter stood in his boat, holding on by the boat-hook to the woodwork at the lock side, waiting for the gates to open, Rogue Riderhood recognized his "T'other governor," Mr. Eugene Wrayburn; who was, however, too indifferent or too much engaged to recognize him.

The creaking lock-gates opened slowly, and the light boat passed in as soon as there was room enough, and the creaking lock-gates closed upon it, and it floated low down in the dock between the two sets of gates, until the water should rise and the second gates should open and let it out. When Riderhood had run to his second windlass and turned it, and while he leaned against the lever of that gate to help it to swing open presently, he noticed, lying to rest under the green hedge by the towing-path astern of the Lock, a Bargeman.

The water rose and rose as the sluice poured in, dispersing the scum which had formed behind the lumbering gates, and sending the boat up, so that the sculler gradually rose like an apparition against the light from the bargeman's point of view. Riderhood observed that the bargeman rose too, leaning on his arm, and seemed to have his eyes fastened on the rising figure.

But, there was the toll to be taken, as the gates were now com-

plaining and opening. The T'other governor tossed it ashore, twisted in a piece of paper, and as he did so, knew his man.

"Ay, ay? It's you, is it, honest friend?" said Eugene, seating himself preparatory to resuming his sculls. "You got the place, then?"

"I got the place, and no thanks to you for it, nor yet none to Lawyer Lightwood," gruffly answered Riderhood.

"We saved our recommendation, honest fellow," said Eugene, "for the next candidate—the one who will offer himself when you are transported or hanged. Don't be long about it; will you be so good?"

So imperturbable was the air with which he gravely bent to his work that Riderhood remained staring at him, without having found a retort, until he had rowed past a line of wooden objects by the weir, which showed like huge teetotums standing at rest in the water, and was almost hidden by the drooping boughs on the left bank, as he rowed away, keeping out of the opposing current. It being then too late to retort with any effect—if that could ever have been done—the honest man confined himself to cursing and growling in a grim under-tone. Having then got his gates shut, he crossed back by his plank lock-bridge to the towing-path side of the river.

If, in so doing, he took another glance at the bargeman, he did it by stealth. He cast himself on the grass by the Lock side, in an indolent way, with his back in that direction, and, having gathered a few blades, fell to chewing them. The dip of Eugene Wrayburn's sculls had become hardly audible in his ears when the bargeman passed him, putting the utmost width that he could between them, and keeping under the hedge. Then, Riderhood sat up and took a long look at his figure, and then cried: "Hi—i—i! Lock, ho! Lock! Plashwater Weir-Mill Lock!"

The bargeman stopped, and looked back.

"Plashwater Weir-Mill Lock, T'otherest gov—er—nor—or—or—or!" cried Mr. Riderhood, with his hands to his mouth.

The bargeman turned back. Approaching nearer and nearer, the bargeman became Bradley Headstone, in rough water-side second-hand clothing.

"Wish I may die," said Riderhood, smiting his right leg, and laughing, as he sat on the grass, "if you ain't ha' been a imitating me, T'otherest governor! Never thought myself so good-looking afore!"

Truly, Bradley Headstone had taken careful note of the honest man's dress in the course of that night-walk they had had together. He must have committed it to memory, and slowly got it by heart. It was exactly reproduced in the dress he now wore. And whereas, in his own schoolmaster clothes, he usually looked as if they were the clothes of some other man, he now looked, in the clothes of some other man or men, as if they were his own.

"*This* your Lock?" said Bradley, whose surprise had a genuine air; "they told me, where I last inquired, it was the third I should come to. This is only the second."

"It's my belief, governor," returned Riderhood, with a wink and shake of his head, "that you've dropped one in your counting. It ain't Locks as *you*'ve been giving your mind to. No, no!"

As he expressively jerked his pointing finger in the direction the

boat had taken, a flush of impatience mounted into Bradley's face, and he looked anxiously up the river.

"It ain't Locks as *you*'ve been a reckoning up," said Riderhood, when the schoolmaster's eyes came back again. "No, no!"

"What other calculations do you suppose I have been occupied with? Mathematics?"

"I never heerd it called that. It's a long word for it. Hows'ever, p'raps you call it so," said Riderhood, stubbornly chewing his grass.

"It. What?"

"I'll say them, instead of it, if you like," was the coolly growled reply. "It's safer talk too."

"What do you mean that I should understand by them?"

"Spites, affronts, offences giv' and took, deadly aggrawations, such like," answered Riderhood.

Do what Bradley Headstone would, he could not keep that former flush of impatience out of his face, or so master his eyes as to prevent their again looking anxiously up the river.

"Ha ha! Don't be afeerd, T'otherest," said Riderhood. "The T'other's got to make way agin the stream, and he takes it easy. You can soon come up with him. But wot's the good of saying that to you! *You* know how fur you could have outwalked him betwixt anywheres about where he lost the tide—say Richmond—and this, if you had had a mind to it."

"You think I have been following him?" said Bradley.

"I KNOW you have," said Riderhood.

"Well! I have, I have," Bradley admitted. "But," with another anxious look up the river, "he may land."

"Easy you! He won't be lost if he does land," said Riderhood. "He must leave his boat behind him. He can't make a bundle or a parcel on it, and carry it ashore with him under his arm."

"He was speaking to you just now," said Bradley, kneeling on one knee on the grass beside the Lock-keeper. "What did he say?"

"Cheek," said Riderhood.

"What?"

"Cheek," repeated Riderhood, with an angry oath; "cheek is what he said. He can't say nothing but cheek. I'd ha' liked to plump down aboard of him, neck and crop, with a heavy jump, and sunk him."

Bradley turned away his haggard face for a few moments, and then said, tearing up a tuft of grass:

"Damn him!"

"Hooroar!" cried Riderhood. "Does you credit! Hoorcar! I cry chorus to the T'otherest."

"What turn," said Bradley, with an effort at self-repression that forced him to wipe his face, "did his insolence take to-day?"

"It took the turn," answered Riderhood, with sullen ferocity, "of hoping as I was getting ready to be hanged."

"Let him look to that," cried Bradley. "Let him look to that! It will be bad for him when men he has injured, and at whom he has jeered, are thinking of getting hanged. Let *him* get ready for *his* fate, when that comes about. There was more meaning in what he said than he knew of, or he wouldn't have had brains enough to say

it. Let him look to it; let him look to it! When men he has wronged, and on whom he has bestowed his insolence, are getting ready to be hanged, there is a death-bell ringing. And not for them."

Riderhood, looking fixedly at him, gradually arose from his recumbent posture while the schoolmaster said these words with the utmost concentration of rage and hatred. So, when the words were all spoken, he too kneeled on one knee on the grass, and the two men looked at one another.

"Oh!" said Riderhood, very deliberately spitting out the grass he had been chewing. "Then, I make out, T'otherest, as he is a-going to her?"

"He left London," answered Bradley, "yesterday. I have hardly a doubt, this time, that at last he is going to her."

"You ain't sure, then?"

"I am as sure here," said Bradley, with a clutch at the breast of his coarse shirt, "as if it was written there;" with a blow or a stab at the sky.

"Ah! But judging from the looks on you," retorted Riderhood, completely ridding himself of his grass, and drawing his sleeve across his mouth, "you've made ekally sure afore, and have got disapinted. It has told upon you."

"Listen," said Bradley, in a low voice, bending forward to lay his hand upon the Lock-keeper's shoulder. "These are my holidays."

"Are they, by George!" muttered Riderhood, with his eyes on the passion-wasted face. "Your working days must be stiff 'uns, if these is your holidays."

"And I have never left him," pursued Bradley, waving the interruption aside with an impatient hand, "since they began. And I never will leave him now, till I have seen him with her."

"And when you have seen him with her?" said Riderhood.

"— I'll come back to you."

Riderhood stiffened the knee on which he had been resting, got up, and looked gloomily at his new friend. After a few moments they walked side by side in the direction the boat had taken, as if by tacit consent; Bradley pressing forward, and Riderhood holding back: Bradley getting out his neat prim purse into his hand (a present made him by penny subscription among his pupils); and Riderhood, unfolding his arms to smear his coat-cuff across his mouth with a thoughtful air.

"I have a pound for you," said Bradley.

"You've two," said Riderhood.

Bradley held a sovereign between his fingers. Slouching at his side with his eyes upon the towing-path, Riderhood held his left hand open, with a certain slight drawing action towards himself. Bradley dipped in his purse for another sovereign, and two chinked in Riderhood's hand, the drawing action of which, promptly strengthening, drew them home to his pocket.

"Now, I must follow him," said Bradley Headstone. "He takes this river-road—the fool!—to confuse observation, or divert attention, if not solely to baffle me. But he must have the power of making himself invisible before he can shake Me off."

Riderhood stopped. "If you don't get disapinted agin, T'otherest, maybe you'll put up at the Lock-house when you come back?"

"I will."

Riderhood nodded, and the figure of the bargeman went its way along the soft turf by the side of the towing-path, keeping near the hedge and moving quickly. They had turned a point from which a long stretch of river was visible. A stranger to the scene might have been certain that here and there along the line of hedge a figure stood, watching the bargeman, and waiting for him to come up. So he himself had often believed at first, until his eyes became used to the posts, bearing the dagger that slew Wat Tyler, in the City of London shield.

Within Mr. Riderhood's knowledge all daggers were as one. Even to Bradley Headstone, who could have told to the letter without book all about Wat Tyler, Lord Mayor Walworth, and the King, that it is dutiful for youth to know, there was but one subject living in the world for every sharp destructive instrument that summer evening. So, Riderhood looking after him as he went, and he with his furtive hand laid upon the dagger as he passed it, and his eyes upon the boat, were much upon a par.

The boat went on, under the arching trees, and over their tranquil shadows in the water. The bargeman skulking on the opposite bank of the stream, went on after it. Sparkles of light showed Riderhood when and where the rower dipped his blades, until, even as he stood idly watching, the sun went down and the landscape was dyed red. And then the red had the appearance of fading out of it and mounting up to Heaven, as we say that blood, guiltily shed, does.

Turning back towards his Lock (he had not gone out of view of it), the Rogue pondered as deeply as it was within the contracted power of such a fellow to do. "Why did he copy my clothes? He could have looked like what he wanted to look like, without that." This was the subject-matter in his thoughts; in which, too, there came lumbering up, by times, like any half floating and half sinking rubbish in the river, the question, Was it done by accident? The setting of a trap for finding out whether it was accidentally done, soon superseded, as a practical piece of cunning, the abstruser inquiry why otherwise it was done. And he devised a means.

Rogue Riderhood went into his Lock-house, and brought forth, into the now sober grey light, his chest of clothes. Sitting on the grass beside it, he turned out, one by one, the articles it contained, until he came to a conspicuous bright red neckerchief stained black here and there by wear. It arrested his attention, and he sat pausing over it, until he took off the rusty colourless wisp that he wore round his throat, and substituted the red neckerchief, leaving the long ends flowing. "Now," said the Rogue, "if arter he sees me in this neckhankecher, I see him in a sim'lar neckhankecher, it won't be accident!" Elated by his device, he carried his chest in again and went to supper.

"Lock ho! Lock!" It was a light night, and a barge coming down summoned him out of a long doze. In due course he had let the

barge through and was alone again, looking to the closing of his gates, when Bradley Headstone appeared before him, standing on the brink of the Lock.

"Halloa!" said Riderhood. "Back a' ready, T'otherest?"

"He has put up for the night, at an Angler's Inn," was the fatigued and hoarse reply. "He goes on, up the river, at six in the morning. I have come back for a couple of hours' rest."

"You want 'em," said Riderhood, making towards the schoolmaster by his plank bridge.

"I don't want them," returned Bradley, irritably, "because I would rather not have them, but would much prefer to follow him all night. However, if he won't lead, I can't follow. I have been waiting about, until I could discover, for a certainty, at what time he starts; if I couldn't have made sure of it, I should have stayed there.—This would be a bad pit for a man to be flung into with his hands tied. These slippery smooth walls would give him no chance. And I suppose those gates would suck him down?"

"Suck him down, or swaller him up, he wouldn't get out," said Riderhood. "Not even if his hands warn't tied, he wouldn't. Shut him in at both ends, and I'd give him a pint o' old ale ever to come up to me standing here."

Bradley looked down with a ghastly relish. "You run about the brink, and run across it, in this uncertain light, on a few inches width of rotten wood," said he. "I wonder you have no thought of being drowned."

"I can't be!" said Riderhood.

"You can't be drowned?"

"No!" said Riderhood, shaking his head with an air of thorough conviction, "it's well known. I've been brought out o' drowning, and I can't be drowned. I wouldn't have that there busted B'lowbridger aware on it, or her people might make it tell agin' the damages I mean to get. But it's well known to water-side characters like myself, that him as has been brought out o' drowning, can never be drowned."

Bradley smiled sourly at the ignorance he would have corrected in one of his pupils, and continued to look down into the water, as if the place had a gloomy fascination for him.

"You seem to like it," said Riderhood.

He took no notice, but stood looking down, as if he had not heard the words. There was a very dark expression on his face; an expression that the Rogue found it hard to understand. It was fierce, and full of purpose; but the purpose might have been as much against himself as against another. If he had stepped back for a spring, taken a leap, and thrown himself in, it would have been no surprising sequel to the look. Perhaps his troubled soul, set upon some violence, did hover for the moment between that violence and another.

"Didn't you say," asked Riderhood, after watching him for a while with a sidelong glance, "as you had come back for a couple o' hours' rest?" But, even then he had to jog him with his elbow before he answered.

"Eh? Yes."

"Hadn't you better come in and take your couple o' hours' rest?"

"Thank you. Yes."

With the look of one just awakened, he followed Riderhood into the Lock-house, where the latter produced from a cupboard some cold salt beef and half a loaf, some gin in a bottle, and some water in a jug. The last he brought in, cool and dripping, from the river.

"There, T'otherest," said Riderhood, stooping over him to put it on the table. "You'd better take a bite and a sup, afore you takes your snooze." The draggling ends of the red neckerchief caught the schoolmaster's eyes. Riderhood saw him look at it.

"Oh!" thought that worthy. "You're a-taking notice, are you? Come! You shall have a good squint at it then." With which reflection he sat down on the other side of the table, threw open his vest, and made a pretence of re-tying the neckerchief with much deliberation.

Bradley ate and drank. As he sat at his platter and mug, Riderhood saw him, again and yet again, steal a look at the neckerchief, as if he were correcting his slow observation and prompting his sluggish memory. "When you're ready for your snooze," said that honest creature, "chuck yourself on my bed in the corner, T'otherest. It'll be broad day afore three. I'll call you early."

"I shall require no calling," answered Bradley. And soon afterwards, divesting himself only of his shoes and coat, laid himself down.

Riderhood, leaning back in his wooden arm-chair with his arms folded on his breast, looked at him lying with his right hand clenched in his sleep and his teeth set, until a film came over his own sight, and he slept too. He awoke to find that it was daylight, and that his visitor was already astir, and going out to the river-side to cool his head:—"Though I'm blest," muttered Riderhood at the Lock-house door, looking after him, "if I think there's water enough in all the Thames to do *that* for you!" Within five minutes he had taken his departure, and was passing on into the calm distance as he had passed yesterday. Riderhood knew when a fish leaped, by his starting and glancing round.

"Lock ho! Lock!" at intervals all day, and "Lock ho! Lock!" thrice in the ensuing night, but no return of Bradley. The second day was sultry and oppressive. In the afternoon, a thunderstorm came up, and had but newly broken into a furious sweep of rain when he rushed in at the door, like the storm itself.

"You've seen him with her!" exclaimed Riderhood, starting up.

"I have."

"Where?"

"At his journey's end. His boat's hauled up for three days. I heard him give the order. Then, I saw him wait for her and meet her. I saw them"—he stopped as though he were suffocating, and began again—"I saw them walking side by side, last night."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing."

"What are you going to do?"

He dropped into a chair, and laughed. Immediately afterwards, a great spirt of blood burst from his nose.

"How does that happen?" asked Riderhood.

"I don't know. I can't keep it back. It has happened twice—three times—four times—I don't know how many times—since last night. I taste it, smell it, see it, it chokes me, and then it breaks out like this."

He went into the pelting rain again with his head bare, and, bending low over the river, and scooping up the water with his two hands, washed the blood away. All beyond his figure, as Riderhood looked from the door, was a vast dark curtain in solemn movement towards one quarter of the heavens. He raised his head and came back, wet from head to foot, but with the lower part of his sleeves, where he had dipped into the river, streaming water.

"Your face is like a ghost's," said Riderhood.

"Did you ever see a ghost?" was the sullen retort.

"I mean to say, you're quite wore out."

"That may well be. I have had no rest since I left here. I don't remember that I have so much as sat down since I left here."

"Lie down now, then," said Riderhood.

"I will, if you'll give me something to quench my thirst first."

The bottle and jug were again produced, and he mixed a weak draught, and another, and drank both in quick succession. "You asked me something," he said then.

"No, I didn't," replied Riderhood.

"I tell you," retorted Bradley, turning upon him in a wild and desperate manner, "you asked me something, before I went out to wash my face in the river."

"Oh! Then?" said Riderhood, backing a little. "I asked you wot you wos a-going to do."

"How can a man in this state know?" he answered, protesting with both his tremulous hands, with an action so vigorously angry that he shook the water from his sleeves upon the floor, as if he had wrung them. "How can I plan anything, if I haven't sleep?"

"Why, that's what I as good as said," returned the other. "Didn't I say lie down?"

"Well, perhaps you did."

"Well! Anyways I says it again. Sleep where you slept last; the sounder and longer you can sleep, the better you'll know arterwards what you're up to."

His pointing to the truckle bed in the corner, seemed gradually to bring that poor couch to Bradley's wandering remembrance. He slipped off his worn down-trodden shoes, and cast himself heavily, all wet as he was, upon the bed.

Riderhood sat down in his wooden arm-chair, and looked through the window at the lightning, and listened to the thunder. But, his thoughts were far from being absorbed by the thunder and the lightning, for again and again and again he looked very curiously at the exhausted man upon the bed. The man had turned up the collar of the rough coat he wore, to shelter himself from the storm, and had buttoned it about his neck. Unconscious of that, and of most things, he had left the coat so, both when he had laved his face in the river, and when he had cast himself upon the

bed; though it would have been much easier to him if he had unloosened it.

The thunder rolled heavily, and the forked lightning seemed to make jagged rents in every part of the vast curtain without, as Riderhood sat by the window, glancing at the bed. Sometimes, he saw the man upon the bed, by a red light; sometimes, by a blue; sometimes, he scarcely saw him in the darkness of the storm; sometimes he saw nothing of him in the blinding glare of palpitating white fire. Anon, the rain would come again with a tremendous rush, and the river would seem to rise to meet it, and a blast of wind, bursting upon the door, would flutter the hair and dress of the man, as if invisible messengers were come around the bed to carry him away. From all these phases of the storm, Riderhood would turn, as if they were interruptions—rather striking interruptions possibly, but interruptions still—of his scrutiny of the sleeper.

"He sleeps sound," he said within himself; "yet he's that up to me and that noticing of me that my getting out of my chair may wake him, when a rattling peal won't; let alone my touching of him."

He very cautiously rose to his feet. "T'otherest," he said, in a low, calm voice, "are you a lying easy? There's a chill in the air, governor. Shall I put a coat over you?"

No answer.

"That's about what it is a'ready, you see," muttered Riderhood in a lower and a different voice; "a coat over you, a coat over you!"

The sleeper moving an arm, he sat down again in his chair, and feigned to watch the storm from the window. It was a grand spectacle, but not so grand as to keep his eyes, for half a minute together, from stealing a look at the man upon the bed.

It was at the concealed throat of the sleeper that Riderhood so often looked so curiously, until the sleep seemed to deepen into the stupor of the dead-tired in mind and body. Then, Riderhood came from the window cautiously, and stood by the bed.

"Poor man!" he murmured in a low tone, with a crafty face, and a very watchful eye and ready foot, lest he should start up; "this here coat of his must make him uneasy in his sleep. Shall I loosen it for him, and make him more comfortable? Ah! I think I ought to it, poor man. I think I will."

He touched the first button with a very cautious hand, and a step backward. But, the sleeper remaining in profound unconsciousness, he touched the other buttons with a more assured hand, and perhaps the more lightly on that account. Softly and slowly, he opened the coat and drew it back.

The draggling ends of a bright-red neckerchief were then disclosed, and he had even been at the pains of dipping parts of it in some liquid, to give it the appearance of having become stained by wear. With a much-perplexed face, Riderhood looked from it to the sleeper, and from the sleeper to it, and finally crept back to his chair, and there, with his hand to his chin, sat long in a brown study, looking at both.

CHAPTER II.

THE GOLDEN DUSTMAN RISES A LITTLE.

Mr. and Mrs. Lammle had come to breakfast with Mr. and Mrs. Boffin. They were not absolutely uninvited, but had pressed themselves with so much urgency on the golden couple, that evasion of the honor and pleasure of their company would have been difficult, if desired. They were in a charming state of mind, were Mr. and Mrs. Lammle, and almost as fond of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin as of one another.

"My dear Mrs. Boffin," said Mrs. Lammle, "it imparts new life to me, to see my Alfred in confidential communication with Mr. Boffin. The two were formed to become intimate. So much simplicity combined with so much force of character, such natural sagacity united to such amiability and gentleness—these are the distinguishing characteristics of both."

This being said aloud, gave Mr. Lammle an opportunity, as he came with Mr. Boffin from the window to the breakfast table, of taking up his dear and honored wife.

"My Sophronia," said that gentleman, "your too partial estimate of your poor husband's character——"

"No! Not too partial, Alfred," urged the lady, tenderly moved; "never say that."

"My child, your favourable opinion, then, of your husband—you don't object to that phrase, darling?"

"How can I, Alfred?"

"Your favourable opinion then, my Precious, does less than justice to Mr. Boffin, and more than justice to me."

"To the first charge, Alfred, I plead guilty. But to the second, oh no, no!"

"Less than justice to Mr. Boffin, Sophronia," said Mr. Lammle, soaring into a tone of moral grandeur, "because it represents Mr. Boffin as on my lower level; more than justice to me, Sophronia, because it represents me as on Mr. Boffin's higher level. Mr. Boffin bears and forbears far more than I could."

"Far more than you could for yourself, Alfred?"

"My love, that is not the question."

"Not the question, Lawyer?" said Mrs. Lammle, archly.

"No, dear Sophronia. From my lower level, I regard Mr. Boffin as too generous, as possessed of too much clemency, as being too good to persons who are unworthy of him and ungrateful to him. To those noble qualities I can lay no claim. On the contrary, they rouse my indignation when I see them in action."

"Alfred!"

"They rouse my indignation, my dear, against the unworthy persons, and give me a combative desire to stand between Mr. Boffin and all such persons. Why? Because, in my lower nature I am more worldly and less delicate. Not being so magnanimous as Mr.

Boffin, I feel his injuries more than he does himself, and feel more capable of opposing his injurers."

It struck Mrs. Lammle that it appeared rather difficult this morning to bring Mr. and Mrs. Boffin into agreeable conversation. Here had been several lures thrown out, and neither of them had uttered a word. Here were she, Mrs. Lammle, and her husband discoursing at once affectingly and effectively, but discoursing alone. Assuming that the dear old creatures were impressed by what they heard, still one would like to be sure of it, the more so, as at least one of the dear old creatures was somewhat pointedly referred to. If the dear old creatures were too bashful or too dull to assume their required places in the discussion, why then it would seem desirable that the dear old creatures should be taken by their heads and shoulders and brought into it.

"But is not my husband saying in effect," asked Mrs. Lammle, therefore, with an innocent air, of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, "that he becomes unmindful of his own temporary misfortunes in his admiration of another whom he is burning to serve? And is not that making an admission that his nature is a generous one? I am wretched in argument, but surely this is so, dear Mr. and Mrs. Boffin?"

Still, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Boffin said a word. He sat with his eyes on his plate, eating his muffins and ham, and she sat shyly looking at the teapot. Mrs. Lammle's innocent appeal was merely thrown into the air, to mingle with the steam of the urn. Glancing towards Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, she very slightly raised her eyebrows, as though inquiring of her husband: "Do I notice anything wrong here?"

Mr. Lammle, who had found his chest effective on a variety of occasions, manœuvred his capacious shirt front into the largest demonstration possible, and then smiling retorted on his wife, thus:

"Sophronia, darling, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin will remind you of the old adage, that self-praise is no recommendation."

"Self-praise, Alfred? Do you mean because we are one and the same?"

"No, my dear child. I mean that you cannot fail to remember, if you reflect for a single moment, that what you are pleased to compliment me upon feeling in the case of Mr. Boffin, you have yourself confided to me as your own feeling in the case of Mrs. Boffin."

("I shall be beaten by this Lawyer," Mrs. Lammle gaily whispered to Mrs. Boffin. "I am afraid I must admit it, if he presses me, for it's damagingly true.")

Several white dints began to come and go about Mr. Lammle's nose, as he observed that Mrs. Boffin merely looked up from the teapot for a moment with an embarrassed smile, which was no smile, and then looked down again.

"Do you admit the charge, Sophronia?" inquired Alfred, in a rallying tone.

"Really, I think," said Mrs. Lammle, still gaily, "I must throw myself on the protection of the Court. Am I bound to answer that question, my Lord?" To Mr. Boffin.

"You needn't, if you don't like, ma'am," was his answer. "It's not of the least consequence."

Both husband and wife glanced at him, very doubtfully. His manner was grave, but not coarse, and derived some dignity from a certain repressed dislike of the tone of the conversation.

Again Mrs. Lammle raised her eyebrows for instruction from her husband. He replied in a slight nod, "Try 'em again."

"To protect myself against the suspicion of covert self-laudation, my dear Mrs. Boffin," said the airy Mrs. Lammle therefore, "I must tell you how it was."

"No. Pray don't," Mr. Boffin interposed.

Mrs. Lammle turned to him laughingly. "The Court objects?"

"Ma'am," said Mr. Boffin, "the Court (if I am the Court) does object. The Court objects for two reasons. First, because the Court don't think it fair. Secondly, because the dear old lady, Mrs. Court (if I am Mr.) gets distressed by it."

A very remarkable wavering between two bearings—between her propitiatory bearing there, and her defiant bearing at Mr. Twemlow's—was observable on the part of Mrs. Lammle as she said: "What does the Court not consider fair?"

"Letting you go on," replied Mr. Boffin, nodding his head soothingly, as who should say, We won't be harder on you than we can help; we'll make the best of it. "It's not above-board and it's not fair. When the old lady is uncomfortable, there's sure to be good reason for it. I see she is uncomfortable, and I plainly see this is the good reason wherefore. *Have* you breakfasted, ma'am."

Mrs. Lammle, settling into her defiant manner, pushed her plate away, looked at her husband, and laughed; but by no means gaily.

"Have *you* breakfasted, sir?" inquired Mr. Boffin.

"Thank you," replied Alfred, showing all his teeth. "If Mrs. Boffin will oblige me, I'll take another cup of tea."

He spilled a little of it over the chest which ought to have been so effective, and which had done so little; but on the whole drank it with something of an air, though the coming and going dints got almost as large, the while, as if they had been made by pressure of the teaspoon. "A thousand thanks," he then observed. "I have breakfasted."

"Now, which," said Mr. Boffin softly, taking out a pocket-book, "which of you two is Cashier?"

"Sophronia, my dear," remarked her husband, as he leaned back in his chair, waving his right hand towards her, while he hung his left hand by the thumb in the arm-hole of his waistcoat: "it shall be your department."

"I would rather," said Mr. Boffin, "that it was your husband's, ma'am, because—but never mind, because. I would rather have to do with him. However, what I have to say, I will say with as little offence as possible; if I can say it without any, I shall be heartily glad. You two have done me a service, a very great service, in doing what you did (my old lady knows what it was), and I have put into this envelope a bank note for a hundred pound. I consider the service well worth a hundred pound, and I am well pleased to pay the money. Would you do me the favour to take it, and likewise to accept my thanks?"

With a haughty action, and without looking towards him, Mrs. Lammle held out her left hand, and into it Mr. Boffin put the little packet. When she had conveyed it to her bosom, Mr. Lammle had the appearance of feeling relieved, and breathing more freely, as not having been quite certain that the hundred pounds were his, until the note had been safely transferred out of Mr. Boffin's keeping into his own Sophronia's.

"It is not impossible," said Mr. Boffin, addressing Alfred, "that you have had some general idea, sir, of replacing Rokesmith, in course of time?"

"It is not," assented Alfred, with a glittering smile and a great deal of nose, "not impossible."

"And perhaps, ma'am," pursued Mr. Boffin, addressing Sophronia, "you have been so kind as to take up my old lady in your own mind, and to do her the honor of turning the question over whether you mightn't one of these days have her in charge, like? Whether you mightn't be a sort of Miss Bella Wilfer to her, and something more?"

"I should hope," returned Mrs. Lammle, with a scornful look and in a loud voice, "that if I were anything to your wife, sir, I could hardly fail to be something more than Miss Bella Wilfer, as you call her."

"What do *you* call her, ma'am?" asked Mr. Boffin.

Mrs. Lammle disdained to reply, and sat defiantly beating one foot on the ground.

"Again I think I may say, that's not impossible. Is it, sir?" asked Mr. Boffin, turning to Alfred.

"It is not," said Alfred, smiling assent as before, "not impossible."

"Now," said Mr. Boffin, gently, "it won't do. I don't wish to say a single word that might be afterwards remembered as unpleasant; but it won't do."

"Sophronia, my love," her husband repeated in a bantering manner, "you hear? It won't do."

"No," said Mr. Boffin, with his voice still dropped, "it really won't. You positively must excuse us. If you'll go your way, we'll go ours, and so I hope this affair ends to the satisfaction of all parties."

Mrs. Lammle gave him the look of a decidedly dissatisfied party demanding exemption from the category; but said nothing.

"The best thing we can make of the affair," said Mr. Boffin, "is a matter of business, and as a matter of business it's brought to a conclusion. You have done me a great service, a very great service, and I have paid for it. Is there any objection to the price?"

Mr. and Mrs. Lammle looked at one another across the table, but neither could say that there was. Mr. Lammle shrugged his shoulders, and Mrs. Lammle sat rigid.

"Very good," said Mr. Boffin. "We hope (my old lady and me) that you'll give us credit for taking the plainest and honestest short-cut that could be taken under the circumstances. We have talked it over with a deal of care (my old lady and me), and we have felt that at all to lead you on, or even at all to let you go on of your own selves, wouldn't be the right thing. So, I have openly given you

to understand that—" Mr. Boffin sought for a new turn of speech, but could find none so expressive as his former one, repeated in a confidential tone, "—that it won't do. If I could have put the case more pleasantly I would; but I hope I haven't put it very unpleasantly; at all events I haven't meant to. So," said Mr. Boffin, by way of peroration, "wishing you well in the way you go, we now conclude with the observation that perhaps you'll go it."

Mr. Lammle rose with an impudent laugh on his side of the table, and Mrs. Lammle rose with a disdainful frown on hers. At this moment a hasty foot was heard on the staircase, and Georgiana Podsnap broke into the room, unannounced and in tears.

"Oh, my dear Sophronia," cried Georgiana, wringing her hands as she ran up to embrace her, "to think that you and Alfred should be ruined! Oh, my poor dear Sophronia, to think that you should have had a Sale at your house after all your kindness to me! Oh, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, pray forgive me for this intrusion, but you don't know how fond I was of Sophronia when Pa wouldn't let me go there any more, or what I have felt for Sophronia since I heard from Ma of her having been brought low in the world. You don't, you can't, you never can, think, how I have lain awake at night and cried for my good Sophronia, my first and only friend!"

Mrs. Lammle's manner changed under the poor silly girl's embraces, and she turned extremely pale: directing one appealing look, first to Mrs. Boffin, and then to Mr. Boffin. Both understood her instantly, with a more delicate subtlety than much better educated people, whose perception came less directly from the heart, could have brought to bear upon the case.

"I haven't a minute," said poor little Georgiana, "to stay. I am out shopping early with Ma, and I said I had a headache and got Ma to leave me outside in the phaeton, in Piccadilly, and ran round to Sackville Street, and heard that Sophronia was here, and then Ma came to see, oh such a dreadful old stony woman from the country in a turban in Portland Place, and I said I wouldn't go up with Ma but would drive round and leave cards for the Boffins, which is taking a liberty with the name; but oh my goodness I am distracted, and the phaeton's at the door, and what would Pa say if he knew it!"

"Don't ye be timid, my dear," said Mrs. Boffin. "You came in to see us."

"Oh, no, I didn't," cried Georgiana. "It's very impolite, I know, but I came to see my poor Sophronia, my only friend. Oh! how I felt the separation, my dear Sophronia, before I knew you were brought low in the world, and how much more I feel it now!"

There were actually tears in the bold woman's eyes, as the soft-headed and soft-hearted girl twined her arms about her neck.

"But I've come on business," said Georgiana, sobbing and drying her face, and then searching in a little reticule, "and if I don't despatch it I shall have come for nothing, and oh good gracious! what would Pa say if he knew of Sackville Street, and what would Ma say if she was kept waiting on the doorsteps of that dreadful turban, and there never were such pawing horses as ours unsettling

my mind every moment more and more when I want more mind than I have got, by pawing up Mr. Boffin's street where they have no business to be. Oh! where is, where is it? Oh! I can't find it!" All this time sobbing, and searching in the little reticule.

"What do you miss, my dear?" asked Mr. Boffin, stepping forward.

"Oh! it's little enough," replied Georgiana, "because Ma always treats me as if I was in the nursery (I am sure I wish I was!), but I hardly ever spend it and it has mounted up to fifteen pounds, Sophronia, and I hope three five-pound notes are better than nothing, though so little, so little! And now I have found that—oh, my goodness! there's the other gone next! Oh no, it isn't, here it is!"

With that, always sobbing and searching in the reticule, Georgiana produced a necklace.

"Ma says chits and jewels have no business together," pursued Georgiana, "and that's the reason why I have no trinkets except this, but I suppose my aunt Hawkinson was of a different opinion, because she left me this, though I used to think she might just as well have buried it, for it's always kept in jewellers' cotton. However, here it is, I am thankful to say, and of use at last, and you'll sell it, dear Sophronia, and buy things with it."

"Give it to me," said Mr. Boffin, gently taking it. "I'll see that it's properly disposed of."

"Oh! are you such a friend of Sophronia's, Mr. Boffin?" cried Georgiana. "Oh, how good of you! Oh, my gracious! there was something else, and it's gone out of my head! Oh no, it isn't, I remember what it was. My grandmamma's property, that'll come to me when I am of age, Mr. Boffin, will be all my own, and neither Pa nor Ma nor anybody else will have any control over it, and what I wish to do is to make some of it over somehow to Sophronia and Alfred, by signing something somewhere that'll prevail on somebody to advance them something. I want them to have something handsome to bring them up in the world again. Oh, my goodness me! Being such a friend of my dear Sophronia's, you won't refuse me, will you?"

"No, no," said Mr. Boffin, "it shall be seen to."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" cried Georgiana. "If my maid had a little note and half a crown, I could run round to the pastrycook's to sign something, or I could sign something in the Square if some body would come and cough for me to let 'em in with the key, and would bring a pen and ink with 'em and a bit of blotting-paper. Oh, my gracious! I must tear myself away, or Pa and Ma will both find out! Dear, dear Sophronia, good, good-bye!"

The credulous little creature again embraced Mrs. Lammle most affectionately, and then held out her hand to Mr. Lammle.

"Good-bye, dear Mr. Lammle—I mean Alfred. You won't think after to-day that I have deserted you and Sophronia because you have been brought low in the world, will you? Oh me! oh me! I have been crying my eyes out of my head, and Ma will be sure to ask me what's the matter. Oh, take me down, somebody, please, please, please!"

Mr. Boffin took her down, and saw her driven away, with her poor

little red eyes and weak chin peering over the great apron of the custard-coloured phaeton, as if she had been ordered to expiate some childish misdemeanor by going to bed in the daylight, and were peeping over the counterpane in a miserable flutter of repentance and low spirits. Returning to the breakfast-room, he found Mrs. Lammle still standing on her side of the table, and Mr. Lammle on his.

"I'll take care," said Mr. Boffin, showing the money and the necklace, "that these are soon given back."

Mrs. Lammle had taken up her parasol from a side table, and stood sketching with it on the pattern of the damask cloth, as she had sketched on the pattern of Mr. Twemlow's papered wall.

"You will not undeceive her I hope, Mr. Boffin?" she said, turning her head towards him, but not her eyes.

"No," said Mr. Boffin.

"I mean, as to the worth and value of her friend," Mrs. Lammle explained, in a measured voice, and with an emphasis on her last word.

"No," he returned. "I may try to give a hint at her home that she is in want of kind and careful protection, but I shall say no more than that to her parents, and I shall say nothing to the young lady herself."

"Mr. and Mrs. Boffin," said Mrs. Lammle, still sketching, and seeming to bestow great pains upon it, "there are not many people, I think, who, under the circumstances, would have been so considerate and sparing as you have been to me just now. Do you care to be thanked?"

"Thanks are always worth having," said Mrs. Boffin, in her ready good nature.

"Then thank you both."

"Sophronia," asked her husband, mockingly, "are you sentimental?"

"Well, well, my good sir," Mr. Boffin interposed, "it's a very good thing to think well of another person, and it's a very good thing to be thought well of *by* another person. Mrs. Lammle will be none the worse for it, if she is."

"Much obliged. But I asked Mrs. Lammle if she was."

She stood sketching on the table-cloth, with her face clouded and set, and was silent.

"Because," said Alfred, "I am disposed to be sentimental myself, on your appropriation of the jewels and the money, Mr. Boffin. As our little Georgiana said, three five-pound notes are better than nothing, and if you sell a necklace you can buy things with the produce."

"*If* you sell it," was Mr. Boffin's comment, as he put it in his pocket.

Alfred followed it with his looks, and also greedily pursued the notes until they vanished into Mr. Boffin's waistcoat pocket. Then he directed a look, half exasperated and half jeering, at his wife. She still stood sketching; but, as she sketched, there was a struggle within her, which found expression in the depth of the few last lines the parasol point indented into the table-cloth, and then some tears fell from her eyes.

"Why, confound the woman," exclaimed Lammle, "she *is* sentimental!

She walked to the window, flinching under his angry stare, looked out for a moment, and turned round quite coldly.

"You have had no former cause of complaint on the sentimental score, Alfred, and you will have none in future. It is not worth your noticing. We go abroad soon, with the money we have earned here?"

"You know we do; you know we must."

"There is no fear of my taking any sentiment with me. I should soon be eased of it, if I did. But it will be all left behind. It *is* all left behind. Are you ready, Alfred?"

"What the deuce have I been waiting for but you, Sophronia?"

"Let us go then. I am sorry I have delayed our dignified departure."

She passed out and he followed her. Mr. and Mrs. Boffin had the curiosity softly to raise a window and look after them as they went down the long street. They walked arm-in-arm, showily enough, but without appearing to interchange a syllable. It might have been fanciful to suppose that under their outer bearing there was something of the shamed air of two cheats who were linked together by concealed handcuffs; but, not so, to suppose that they were haggardly weary of one another, of themselves, and of all this world. In turning the street corner they might have turned out of this world, for anything Mr. and Mrs. Boffin ever saw of them to the contrary; for, they set eyes on the Lammles never more.

CHAPTER III.

THE GOLDEN DUSTMAN SINKS AGAIN.

THE evening of that day being one of the reading evenings at the Bower, Mr. Boffin kissed Mrs. Boffin after a five o'clock dinner, and trotted out, nursing his big stick in both arms, so that, as of old, it seemed to be whispering in his ear. He carried so very attentive an expression on his countenance that it appeared as if the confidential discourse of the big stick required to be followed closely. Mr. Boffin's face was like the face of a thoughtful listener to an intricate communication, and, in trotting along, he occasionally glanced at that companion with the look of a man who was interposing the remark: "You don't mean it!"

Mr. Boffin and his stick went on alone together, until they arrived at certain cross-ways where they would be likely to fall in with any one coming, at about the same time, from Clerkenwell to the Bower. Here they stopped, and Mr. Boffin consulted his watch.

"It wants five minutes, good, to Venus's appointment," said he. "I'm rather early."

But Venus was a punctual man, and, even as Mr. Boffin replaced his watch in its pocket, was to be descried coming towards him. He quickened his pace on seeing Mr. Boffin already at the place of meeting, and was soon at his side.

"Thank'ee, Venus," said Mr. Boffin. "Thank'ee, thank'ee, thank'ee!"

It would not have been very evident why he thanked the anatomist, but for his furnishing the explanation in what he went on to say.

"All right, Venus, all right. Now, that you've been to see me, and have consented to keep up the appearance before Wegg of remaining in it for a time, I have got a sort of a backer. All right, Venus. Thank'ee, Venus. Thank'ee, thank'ee, thank'ee!"

Mr. Venus shook the proffered hand with a modest air, and they pursued the direction of the Bower.

"Do you think Wegg is likely to drop down upon me to-night, Venus?" inquired Mr. Boffin, wistfully, as they went along.

"I think he is, sir."

"Have you any particular reason for thinking so, Venus?"

"Well, sir," returned that personage, "the fact is, he has given me another look-in, to make sure of what he calls our stock-in-trade being correct, and he has mentioned his intention that he was not to be put off beginning with you the very next time you should come. And this," hinted Mr. Venus, delicately, "being the very next time, you know, sir——"

—"Why, therefore you suppose he'll turn to at the grindstone, eh, Wegg?" said Mr. Boffin.

"Just so, sir."

Mr. Boffin took his nose in his hand, as if it were already excoriated, and the sparks were beginning to fly out of that feature. "He's a terrible fellow, Venus; he's an awful fellow. I don't know how ever I shall go through with it. You must stand by me, Venus, like a good man and true. You'll do all you can to stand by me, Venus; won't you?"

Mr. Venus replied with the assurance that he would; and Mr. Boffin, looking anxious and dispirited, pursued the way in silence until they rang at the Bower gate. The stumping approach of Wegg was soon heard behind it, and as it turned upon its hinges he became visible with his hand on the lock.

"Mr. Boffin, sir?" he remarked. "You're quite a stranger!"

"Yes. I've been otherwise occupied, Wegg."

"Have you indeed, sir?" returned the literary gentleman, with a threatening sneer. "Hah! I've been looking for you, sir, rather what I may call specially."

"You don't say so, Wegg?"

"Yes, I do say so, sir. And if you hadn't come round to me to-night, dash my wig if I wouldn't have come round to you to-morrow. Now! I tell you!"

"Nothing wrong, I hope, Wegg?"

"Oh no, Mr. Boffin," was the ironical answer. "Nothing wrong! What should be wrong in Boffinses Bower! Step in, sir."

> 'If you'll come to the Bower I've shaded for you,
> 'Your bed shan't be roses all spangled with doo:
> 'Will you, will you, will you, will you, come to the Bower?
> 'Oh, won't you, won't you, won't you, won't you, come to the Bower?'"

An unholy glare of contradiction and offence shone in the eyes of Mr. Wegg, as he turned the key on his patron, after ushering him into the yard with this vocal quotation. Mr. Boffin's air was crestfallen and submissive. Whispered Wegg to Venus, as they crossed the yard behind him: "Look at the worm and minion; he's down

in the mouth already." Whispered Venus to Wegg: "That's because I've told him. I've prepared the way for you."

Mr. Boffin, entering the usual chamber, laid his stick upon the settle usually reserved for him, thrust his hands into his pockets, and, with his shoulders raised and his hat drooping back upon them, looked disconsolately at Wegg. "My friend and partner, Mr. Venus, gives me to understand," remarked that man of might, addressing him, "that you are aware of our power over you. Now, when you have took your hat off, we'll go into that pint."

Mr. Boffin shook it off with one shake, so that it dropped on the floor behind him, and remained in his former attitude with his former rueful look upon him.

"First of all, I'm a-going to call you Boffin, for short," said Wegg. "If you don't like it, it's open to you to lump it."

"I don't mind it, Wegg," Mr. Boffin replied.

"That's lucky for you, Boffin. Now, do you want to be read to?"

"I don't particularly care about it to-night, Wegg."

"Because if you did want to," pursued Mr. Wegg, the brilliancy of whose point was dimmed by his having been unexpectedly answered: "you wouldn't be. I've been your slave long enough. I'm not to be trampled under-foot by a dustman any more. With the single exception of the salary, I renounce the whole and total sitiwation."

"Since you say it is to be so, Wegg," returned Mr. Boffin, with folded hands, "I suppose it must be."

"*I* suppose it must be," Wegg retorted. "Next (to clear the ground before coming to business), you've placed in this yard a skulking, a sneaking, and a sniffing, menial."

"He hadn't a cold in his head when I sent him here," said Mr. Boffin.

"Boffin!" retorted Wegg, "I warn you not to attempt a joke with me!"

Here Mr. Venus interposed, and remarked that he conceived Mr. Boffin to have taken the description literally; the rather, forasmuch as he, Mr. Venus, had himself supposed the menial to have contracted an affliction or a habit of the nose, involving a serious drawback on the pleasures of social intercourse, until he had discovered that Mr. Wegg's description of him was to be accepted as merely figurative.

"Any how, and every how," said Wegg, "he has been planted here, and he is here. Now, I won't have him here. So I call upon Boffin, before I say another word, to fetch him in and send him packing to the right-about."

The unsuspecting Sloppy was at that moment airing his many buttons within view of the window. Mr. Boffin, after a short interval of impassive discomfiture, opened the window and beckoned him to come in.

"I call upon Boffin," said Wegg, with one arm a-kimbo and his head on one side, like a bullying counsel pausing for an answer from a witness, "to inform that menial that I am Master here!"

In humble obedience, when the button-gleaming Sloppy entered

Mr. Boffin said to him: "Sloppy, my fine fellow, Mr. Wegg is Master here. He doesn't want you, and you are to go from here."

"For good!" Mr. Wegg severely stipulated.

"For good," said Mr. Boffin.

Sloppy stared, with both his eyes and all his buttons, and his mouth wide open; but was without loss of time escorted forth by Silas Wegg, pushed out at the yard gate by the shoulders, and locked out.

"The atomspear," said Wegg, stumping back into the room again, a little reddened by his late exertion, "is now freer for the purposes of respiration. Mr. Venus, sir, take a chair. Boffin, you may sit down."

Mr. Boffin, still with his hands ruefully stuck in his pockets, sat on the edge of the settle, shrunk into a small compass, and eyed the potent Silas with conciliatory looks.

"This gentleman," said Silas Wegg, pointing out Venus, "this gentleman, Boffin, is more milk and watery with you than I'll be. But he hasn't borne the Roman yoke as I have, nor yet he hasn't been required to pander to your depraved appetite for miserly characters."

"I never meant, my dear Wegg—" Mr. Boffin was beginning, when Silas stopped him.

"Hold your tongue, Boffin! Answer when you're called upon to answer. You'll find you've got quite enough to do. Now, you're aware—are you—that you're in possession of property to which you've no right at all? Are you aware of that?"

"Venus tells me so," said Mr. Boffin, glancing towards him for any support he could give.

"*I* tell you so," returned Silas. "Now, here's my hat, Boffin, and here's my walking-stick. Trifle with me, and instead of making a bargain with you, I'll put on my hat and take up my walking-stick, and go out, and make a bargain with the rightful owner. Now, what do you say?"

"I say," returned Mr. Boffin, leaning forward in alarmed appeal, with his hands on his knees, "that I am sure I don't want to trifle, Wegg. I have said so to Venus."

"You certainly have, sir," said Venus.

"You're too milk and watery with our friend, you are indeed," remonstrated Silas, with a disapproving shake of his wooden head. "Then at once you confess yourself desirous to come to terms, do you, Boffin? Before you answer, keep this hat well in your mind, and also this walking-stick."

"I am willing, Wegg, to come to terms."

"Willing won't do, Boffin. I won't take willing. Are you desirous to come to terms? Do you ask to be allowed as a favor to come to terms?" Mr. Wegg again planted his arm, and put his head on one side.

"Yes."

"Yes what?" said the inexorable Wegg: "I won't take yes. I'll have it out of you in full, Boffin."

"Dear me!" cried that unfortunate gentleman. "I am so worrited! I ask to be allowed to come to terms, supposing your document is all correct."

"Don't you be afraid of that," said Silas, poking his head at him. "You shall be satisfied by seeing it. Mr. Venus will show it you, and I'll hold you the while. Then you want to know what the terms are. Is that about the sum and substance of it? Will you or won't you answer, Boffin?" For he had paused a moment.

"Dear me!" cried that unfortunate gentleman again, "I am worrited to that degree that I'm almost off my head. You hurry me so. Be so good as name the terms, Wegg."

"Now, mark, Boffin," returned Silas: "Mark 'em well, because they're the lowest terms and the only terms. You'll throw your Mound (the little Mound as comes to you any way) into the general estate, and then you'll divide the whole property into three parts, and you'll keep one and hand over the others."

Mr. Venus's mouth screwed itself up, as Mr. Boffin's face lengthened itself; Mr. Venus not having been prepared for such a rapacious demand.

"Now, wait a bit, Boffin," Wegg proceeded, "there's something more. You've been a squandering this property—laying some of it out on yourself. *That* won't do. You've bought a house. You'll be charged for it."

"I shall be ruined, Wegg!" Mr. Boffin faintly protested.

"Now, wait a bit, Boffin; there's something more. You'll leave me in sole custody of these Mounds till they're all laid low. If any waluables should be found in 'em, I'll take care of such waluables. You'll produce your contract for the sale of the Mounds, that we may know to a penny what they're worth, and you'll make out likewise an exact list of all the other property. When the Mounds is cleared away to the last shovel-full, the final diwision will come off."

"Dreadful, dreadful, dreadful! I shall die in a workhouse!" cried the Golden Dustman, with his hands to his head.

"Now, wait a bit, Boffin; there's something more. You've been unlawfully ferreting about this yard. You've been seen in the act of ferreting about this yard. Two pair of eyes at the present moment brought to bear upon you, have seen you dig up a Dutch bottle."

"It was mine, Wegg," protested Mr. Boffin. "I put it there myself."

"What was in it, Boffin?" inquired Silas.

"Not gold, not silver, not bank notes, not jewels, nothing that you could turn into money, Wegg; upon my soul!"

"Prepared, Mr. Venus," said Wegg, turning to his partner with a knowing and superior air, "for an ewasive answer on the part of our dusty friend here, I have hit out a little idea which I think will meet your views. We charge that bottle against our dusty friend at a thousand pound."

Mr. Boffin drew a deep groan.

"Now, wait a bit, Boffin; there's something more. In your employment is an under-handed sneak, named Rokesmith. It won't answer to have *him* about, while this business of ours is about. He must be discharged."

"Rokesmith is already discharged," said Mr. Boffin, speaking in a muffled voice, with his hands before his face, as he rocked himself on the settle.

"Already discharged, is he?" returned Wegg, surprised. "Oh! Then, Boffin, I believe there's nothing more at present."

The unlucky gentleman continuing to rock himself to and fro, and to utter an occasional moan, Mr. Venus besought him to bear up against his reverses, and to take time to accustom himself to the thought of his new position. But, his taking time was exactly the thing of all others that Silas Wegg could not be induced to hear of. "Yes or no, and no half measures!" was the motto which that obdurate person many times repeated; shaking his fist at Mr. Boffin, and pegging his motto into the floor with his wooden leg, in a threatening and alarming manner.

At length, Mr. Boffin entreated to be allowed a quarter of an hour's grace, and a cooling walk of that duration in the yard. With some difficulty Mr. Wegg granted this great favour, but only on condition that he accompanied Mr. Boffin in his walk, as not knowing what he might fraudulently unearth if he were left to himself. A more absurd sight than Mr. Boffin in his mental irritation trotting very nimbly, and Mr. Wegg hopping after him with great exertion, eager to watch the slightest turn of an eyelash, lest it should indicate a spot rich with some secret, assuredly had never been seen in the shadow of the Mounds. Mr. Wegg was much distressed when the quarter of an hour expired, and came hopping in, a very bad second.

"I can't help myself!" cried Mr. Boffin, flouncing on the settle in a forlorn manner, with his hands deep in his pockets, as if his pockets had sunk. "What's the good of my pretending to stand out, when I can't help myself? I must give in to the terms. But I should like to see the document."

Wegg, who was all for clinching the nail he had so strongly driven home, announced that Boffin should see it without an hour's delay. Taking him into custody for that purpose, or overshadowing him as if he really were his Evil Genius in visible form, Mr. Wegg clapped Mr. Boffin's hat upon the back of his head, and walked him out by the arm, asserting a proprietorship over his soul and body that was at once more grim and more ridiculous than anything in Mr. Venus's rare collection. That light-haired gentleman followed close upon their heels, at least backing up Mr. Boffin in a literal sense, if he had not had recent opportunities of doing so spiritually; while Mr. Boffin, trotting on as hard as he could trot, involved Silas Wegg in frequent collisions with the public, much as a pre-occupied blind man's dog may be seen to involve his master.

Thus they reached Mr. Venus's establishment, somewhat heated by the nature of their progress thither. Mr. Wegg, especially, was in a flaming glow, and stood in the little shop, panting and mopping his head with his pocket-handkerchief, speechless for several minutes.

Meanwhile, Mr. Venus, who had left the duelling frogs to fight it out in his absence by candlelight for the public delectation, put the shutters up. When all was snug, and the shop-door fastened, he said to the perspiring Silas: "I suppose, Mr. Wegg, we may now produce the paper?"

"Hold on a minute, sir," replied that discreet character; "hold on a minute. Will you obligingly shove that box—which you mentioned

on a former occasion as containing miscellanies—towards me in the midst of the shop here?"

Mr. Venus did as he was asked.

"Very good," said Silas, looking about: "ve—ry good. Will you hand me that chair, sir, to put a-top of it?"

Venus handed him the chair.

"Now, Boffin," said Wegg, "mount up here and take your seat, will you?"

Mr. Boffin, as if he were about to have his portrait painted, or to be electrified, or to be made a Freemason, or to be placed at any other solitary disadvantage, ascended the rostrum prepared for him.

"Now, Mr. Venus," said Silas, taking off his coat, "when I catches our friend here round the arms and body, and pins him tight to the back of the chair, you may show him what he wants to see. If you'll open it and hold it well up in one hand, sir, and a candle in the other, he can read it charming."

Mr. Boffin seemed rather inclined to object to these precautionary arrangements, but, being immediately embraced by Wegg, resigned himself. Venus then produced the document, and Mr. Boffin slowly spelt it out aloud: so very slowly, that Wegg, who was holding him in the chair with the grip of a wrestler, became again exceedingly the worse for his exertions. "Say when you've put it safe back, Mr. Venus," he uttered with difficulty, "for the strain of this is terrimenjious."

At length the document was restored to its place; and Wegg, whose uncomfortable attitude had been that of a very persevering man unsuccessfully attempting to stand upon his head, took a seat to recover himself. Mr. Boffin, for his part, made no attempt to come down, but remained aloft disconsolate.

"Well, Boffin!" said Wegg, as soon as he was in a condition to speak. "Now, you know."

"Yes, Wegg," said Mr. Boffin, meekly. "Now, I know."

"You have no doubts about it, Boffin."

"No, Wegg. No, Wegg. None," was the slow and sad reply.

"Then, take care, you," said Wegg, "that you stick to your conditions. Mr. Venus, if on this auspicious occasion, you should happen to have a drop of anything not quite so mild as tea in the 'ouse, I think I'd take the friendly liberty of asking you for a specimen of it."

Mr. Venus, reminded of the duties of hospitality, produced some rum. In answer to the inquiry, "Will you mix it, Mr. Wegg?" that gentleman pleasantly rejoined, "I think not, sir. On so auspicious an occasion, I prefer to take it in the form of a Gum-Tickler."

Mr. Boffin, declining rum, being still elevated on his pedestal, was in a convenient position to be addressed. Wegg having eyed him with an impudent air at leisure, addressed him, therefore, while refreshing himself with his dram.

"Bof—fin!"

"Yes, Wegg," he answered, coming out of a fit of abstraction, with a sigh.

"I haven't mentioned one thing, because it's a detail that comes of course. You must be followed up, you know. You must be kept under inspection."

"I don't quite understand," said Mr. Boffin.

"Don't you?" sneered Wegg. "Where's your wits, Boffin? Till the Mounds is down and this business completed, you're accountable for all the property, recollect. Consider yourself accountable to me. Mr. Venus here being too milk and watery with you, I am the boy for you."

"I've been a-thinking," said Mr. Boffin, in a tone of despondency, "that I must keep the knowledge from my old lady."

"The knowledge of the diwision, d'ye mean?" inquired Wegg, helping himself to a third Gum-Tickler—for he had already taken a second.

"Yes. If she was to die first of us two she might then think all her life, poor thing, that I had got the rest of the fortune still, and was saving it."

"I suspect, Boffin," returned Wegg, shaking his head sagaciously, and bestowing a wooden wink upon him, "that you've found out some account of some old chap, supposed to be a Miser, who got himself the credit of having much more money than he had. However, *I* don't mind."

"Don't you see, Wegg?" Mr. Boffin feelingly represented to him: "don't you see? My old lady has got so used to the property. It would be such a hard surprise."

"I don't see it at all," blustered Wegg. "You'll have as much as I shall. And who are you?"

"But then, again," Mr. Boffin gently represented; "my old lady has very upright principles."

"Who's your old lady," returned Wegg, "to set herself up for having uprighter principles than mine?"

Mr. Boffin seemed a little less patient at this point than at any other of the negotiations. But he commanded himself, and said tamely enough: "I think it must be kept from my old lady, Wegg."

"Well," said Wegg, contemptuously, though, perhaps, perceiving some hint of danger otherwise, "keep it from your old lady. *I* ain't going to tell her. I can have you under close inspection without that. I'm as good a man as you, and better. Ask me to dinner. Give me the run of your 'ouse. I was good enough for you and your old lady once, when I helped you out with your weal and hammers. Was there no Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker, before *you* two?"

"Gently, Mr. Wegg, gently," Venus urged.

"Milk and water-erily you mean, sir," he returned, with some little thickness of speech, in consequence of the Gum-Ticklers having tickled it. "I've got him under inspection, and I'll inspect him.

> 'Along the line the signal ran
> 'England expects as this present man
> 'Will keep Boffin to his duty.'

—Boffin, I'll see you home."

Mr. Boffin descended with an air of resignation, and gave himself up, after taking friendly leave of Mr. Venus. Once more, Inspector and Inspected went through the streets together, and so arrived at Mr. Boffin's door.

But even there, when Mr. Boffin had given his keeper good-night, and had let himself in with his key, and had softly closed the door, even there and then, the all-powerful Silas must needs claim another assertion of his newly-asserted power.

"Bof—fin!" he called through the keyhole.

"Yes, Wegg," was the reply through the same channel.

"Come out. Show yourself again. Let's have another look at you!"

Mr. Boffin—ah, how fallen from the high estate of his honest simplicity!—opened the door and obeyed.

"Go in. You may get to bed now," said Wegg, with a grin.

The door was hardly closed, when he again called through the keyhole:

"Bof—fin!"

"Yes, Wegg."

This time Silas made no reply, but laboured with a will at turning an imaginary grindstone outside the keyhole, while Mr. Boffin stooped at it within; he then laughed silently, and stumped home.

CHAPTER IV.

A RUNAWAY MATCH.

Cherubic Pa arose with as little noise as possible from beside majestic Ma, one morning early, having a holiday before him. Pa and the lovely woman had a rather particular appointment to keep.

Yet Pa and the lovely woman were not going out together. Bella was up before four, but had no bonnet on. She was waiting at the foot of the stairs—was sitting on the bottom stair, in fact—to receive Pa when he came down, but her only object seemed to be to get Pa well out of the house.

"Your breakfast is ready, sir," whispered Bella, after greeting him with a hug, "and all you have to do, is, to eat it up and drink it up, and escape. How do you feel, Pa?"

"To the best of my judgment, like a housebreaker new to the business, my dear, who can't make himself quite comfortable till he is off the premises."

Bella tucked her arm in his with a merry noiseless laugh, and they went down to the kitchen on tiptoe; she stopping on every separate stair to put the tip of her forefinger on her rosy lips, and then lay it on his lips, according to her favourite petting way of kissing Pa.

"How do *you* feel, my love?" asked R. W., as she gave him his breakfast.

"I feel as if the Fortune-teller was coming true, dear Pa, and the fair little man was turning out as was predicted."

"Ho! Only the fair little man?" said her father.

Bella put another of those finger-seals upon his lips, and then said, kneeling down by him as he sat at table: "Now, look here, sir. If you keep well up to the mark this day, what do you think you deserve? What did I promise you should have, if you were good, upon a certain occasion?"

"Upon my word I don't remember, Precious. Yes, I do, though. Wasn't it one of these beau—tiful tresses?" with his caressing hand upon her hair.

"Wasn't it, too!" returned Bella, pretending to pout. "Upon my word! Do you know, sir, that the Fortune-teller would give five thousand guineas (if it was quite convenient to him, which it isn't) for the lovely piece I have cut off for you? You can form no idea, sir, of the number of times he kissed quite a scrubby little piece—in comparison—that I cut off for *him*. And he wears it, too, round his neck, I can tell you! Near his heart!" said Bella, nodding. "Ah! very near his heart! However, you have been a good, good boy, and you are the best of all the dearest boys that ever were, this morning, and here's the chain I have made of it, Pa, and you must let me put it round your neck with my own loving hands."

As Pa bent his head, she cried over him a little, and then said (after having stopped to dry her eyes on his white waistcoat, the discovery of which incongruous circumstance made her laugh): "Now, darling Pa, give me your hands that I may fold them together, and do you say after me:—My little Bella."

"My little Bella," repeated Pa.

"I am very fond of you."

"I am very fond of you, my darling," said Pa.

"You mustn't say anything not dictated to you, sir. You daren't do it in your responses at Church, and you mustn't do it in your responses out of Church."

"I withdraw the darling," said Pa.

"That's a pious boy! Now again:—You were always—"

"You were always," repeated Pa.

"A vexatious—"

"No you weren't," said Pa.

"A vexatious (do you hear, sir?), a vexatious, capricious, thankless, troublesome, Animal; but I hope you'll do better in the time to come, and I bless you and forgive you!" Here, she quite forgot that it was Pa's turn to make the responses, and clung to his neck. "Dear Pa, if you knew how much I think this morning of what you told me once, about the first time of our seeing old Mr. Harmon, when I stamped and screamed and beat you with my detestable little bonnet! I feel as if I had been stamping and screaming and beating you with my hateful little bonnet, ever since I was born, darling!"

"Nonsense, my love. And as to your bonnets, they have always been nice bonnets, for they have always become you—or you have become them; perhaps it was that—at every age."

"Did I hurt you much, poor little Pa?" asked Bella, laughing (notwithstanding her repentance), with fantastic pleasure in the picture, "when I beat you with my bonnet?"

"No, my child. Wouldn't have hurt a fly!"

"Ay, but I am afraid I shouldn't have beat you at all, unless I had meant to hurt you," said Bella. "Did I pinch your legs, Pa?"

"Not much, my dear; but I think it's almost time I——"

"Oh, yes!" cried Bella. "If I go on chattering, you'll be taken alive. Fly, Pa, fly!"

So, they went softly up the kitchen stairs on tiptoe, and Bella with

her light hand softly removed the fastenings of the house door, and Pa, having received a parting hug, made off. When he had gone a little way, he looked back. Upon which, Bella set another of those finger seals upon the air, and thrust out her little foot expressive of the mark. Pa, in appropriate action, expressed fidelity to the mark, and made off as fast as he could go.

Bella walked thoughtfully in the garden for an hour and more, and then, returning to the bedroom where Lavvy the Irrepressible still slumbered, put on a little bonnet of quiet, but on the whole of sly appearance, which she had yesterday made. "I am going for a walk, Lavvy," she said, as she stooped down and kissed her. The Irrepressible, with a bounce in the bed, and a remark that it wasn't time to get up yet, relapsed into unconsciousness, if she had come out of it.

Behold Bella tripping along the streets, the dearest girl afoot under the summer sun! Behold Pa waiting for Bella behind a pump, at least three miles from the parental roof-tree. Behold Bella and Pa aboard an early steamboat bound for Greenwich.

Were they expected at Greenwich? Probably. At least, Mr. John Rokesmith was on the pier looking out, about a couple of hours before the coaly (but to him gold-dusty) little steamboat got her steam up in London. Probably. At least, Mr. John Rokesmith seemed perfectly satisfied when he descried them on board. Probably. At least, Bella no sooner stepped ashore than she took Mr. John Rokesmith's arm, without evincing surprise, and the two walked away together with an ethereal air of happiness which, as it were, wafted up from the earth and drew after them a gruff and glum old pensioner to see it out. Two wooden legs had this gruff and glum old pensioner, and, a minute before Bella stepped out of the boat, and drew that confiding little arm of hers through Rokesmith's, he had had no object in life but tobacco, and not enough of that. Stranded was Gruff and Glum in a harbour of everlasting mud, when all in an instant Bella floated him, and away he went.

Say, cherubic parent taking the lead, in what direction do we steer first? With some such inquiry in his thoughts, Gruff and Glum, stricken by so sudden an interest that he perked his neck and looked over the intervening people, as if he were trying to stand on tiptoe with his two wooden legs, took an observation of R. W. There was no "first" in the case, Gruff and Glum made out; the cherubic parent was bearing down and crowding on direct for Greenwich church, to see his relations.

For, Gruff and Glum, though most events acted on him simply as tobacco-stoppers, pressing down and condensing the quids within him, might be imagined to trace a family resemblance between the cherubs in the church architecture, and the cherub in the white waistcoat. Some remembrance of old Valentines, wherein a cherub, less appropriately attired for a proverbially uncertain climate, had been seen conducting lovers to the altar, might have been fancied to inflame the ardour of his timber toes. Be it as it might, he gave his moorings the slip, and followed in chase.

The cherub went before, all beaming smiles; Bella and John Rokesmith followed; Gruff and Glum stuck to them like wax. For

years, the wings of his mind had gone to look after the legs of his body; but Bella had brought them back for him per steamer, and they were spread again.

He was a slow sailer on a wind of happiness, but he took a cross cut for the rendezvous, and pegged away as if he were scoring furiously at cribbage. When the shadow of the church-porch swallowed them up, victorious Gruff and Glum likewise presented himself to be swallowed up. And by this time the cherubic parent was so fearful of surprise, that, but for the two wooden legs on which Gruff and Glum was reassuringly mounted, his conscience might have introduced, in the person of that pensioner, his own stately lady disguised, arrived at Greenwich in a car and griffins, like the spiteful Fairy at the christenings of the Princesses, to do something dreadful to the marriage service. And truly he had a momentary reason to be pale of face, and to whisper to Bella, "You don't think that can be your Ma; do you, my dear?" on account of a mysterious rustling and a stealthy movement somewhere in the remote neighbourhood of the organ, though it was gone directly and was heard no more. Albeit it was heard of afterwards, as will afterwards be read in this veracious register of marriage.

Who taketh? I, John, and so do I, Bella. Who giveth? I., R. W. Forasmuch, Gruff and Glum, as John and Bella have consented together in holy wedlock, you may (in short) consider it done, and withdraw your two wooden legs from this temple. To the foregoing purport, the Minister speaking, as directed by the Rubric, to the People, selectly represented in the present instance by G. and G. above mentioned.

And now, the church-porch having swallowed up Bella Wilfer for ever and ever, had it not in its power to relinquish that young woman, but slid into the happy sunlight, Mrs. John Rokesmith instead. And long on the bright steps stood Gruff and Glum, looking after the pretty bride, with a narcotic consciousness of having dreamed a dream.

After which, Bella took out from her pocket a little letter, and read it aloud to Pa and John; this being a true copy of the same.

"Dearest Ma,

"I hope you won't be angry, but I am most happily married to Mr. John Rokesmith, who loves me better than I can ever deserve, except by loving him with all my heart. I thought it best not to mention it beforehand, in case it should cause any little difference at home. Please tell darling Pa. With love to Lavvy,

"Ever dearest Ma,

"Your affectionate daughter,

"Bella

"(P.S.—Rokesmith)."

Then, John Rokesmith put the queen's countenance on the letter —when had Her Gracious Majesty looked so benign as on that blessed morning!—and then Bella popped it into the post-office, and said merrily, "Now, dearest Pa, you are safe, and will never be taken alive!"

Pa was, at first, in the stirred depths of his conscience, so far from sure of being safe yet, that he made out majestic matrons lurking in ambush among the harmless trees of Greenwich Park, and seemed to see a stately countenance tied up in a well-known pocket-handkerchief glooming down at him from a window of the Observatory, where the Familiars of the Astronomer Royal nightly outwatch the winking stars. But, the minutes passing on and no Mrs. Wilfer in the flesh appearing, he became more confident, and so repaired with good heart and appetite to Mr. and Mrs. John Rokesmith's cottage on Blackheath, where breakfast was ready.

A modest little cottage but a bright and a fresh, and on the snowy tablecloth the prettiest of little breakfasts. In waiting, too, like an attendant summer breeze, a fluttering young damsel, all pink and ribbons, blushing as if she had been married instead of Bella, and yet asserting the triumph of her sex over both John and Pa, in an exulting and exalted flurry: as who should say, "This is what you must all come to, gentlemen, when we choose to bring you to book." This same young damsel was Bella's serving-maid, and unto her did deliver a bunch of keys, commanding treasures in the way of drysaltery, groceries, jams and pickles, the investigation of which made pastime after breakfast, when Bella declared that "Pa must taste everything, John dear, or it will never be lucky," and when Pa had all sorts of things poked into his mouth, and didn't quite know what to do with them when they were put there.

Then they, all three, out for a charming ride, and for a charming stroll among heath in bloom, and there behold the identical Gruff and Glum with his wooden legs horizontally disposed before him, apparently sitting meditating on the vicissitudes of life! To whom said Bella, in her light-hearted surprise: "Oh! How do you do again? What a dear old pensioner you are!" To which Gruff and Glum responded that he see her married this morning, my Beauty, and that if it warn't a liberty he wished her ji and the fairest of fair wind and weather; further, in a general way requesting to know what cheer? and scrambling up on his two wooden legs to salute, hat in hand, ship-shape, with the gallantry of a man-of-warsman and a heart of oak.

It was a pleasant sight, in the midst of the golden bloom, to see this salt old Gruff and Glum, waving his shovel hat at Bella, while his thin white hair flowed free, as if she had once more launched him into blue water again. "You are a charming old pensioner," said Bella, "and I am so happy that I wish I could make you happy, too." Answered Gruff and Glum, "Give me leave to kiss your hand, my Lovely, and it's done!" So it was done to the general contentment; and if Gruff and Glum didn't in the course of the afternoon splice the main brace, it was not for want of the means of inflicting that outrage on the feelings of the Infant Bands of Hope.

But, the marriage dinner was the crowning success, for what had bride and bridegroom plotted to do, but to have and to hold that dinner in the very room of the very hotel where Pa and the lovely woman had once dined together! Bella sat between Pa and John, and divided her attentions pretty equally, but felt it necessary (in the

waiter's absence before dinner) to remind Pa that she was *his* lovely woman no longer.

"I am well aware of it, my dear," returned the cherub, "and I resign you willingly."

"Willingly, sir? You ought to be brokenhearted."

"So I should be, my dear, if I thought that I was going to lose you."

"But you know you are not; don't you, poor dear Pa? You know that you have only made a new relation who will be as fond of you and as thankful to you—for my sake and your own sake both—as I am; don't you, dear little Pa? Look here, Pa!" Bella put her finger on her own lip, and then on Pa's, and then on her own lip again, and then on her husband's. "Now, we are a partnership of three, dear Pa."

The appearance of dinner here cut Bella short in one of her disappearances: the more effectually, because it was put on under the auspices of a solemn gentleman in black clothes and a white cravat, who looked much more like a clergyman than *the* clergyman, and seemed to have mounted a great deal higher in the church: not to say, scaled the steeple. This dignitary, conferring in secrecy with John Rokesmith on the subject of punch and wines, bent his head as though stooping to the Papistical practice of receiving auricular confession. Likewise, on John's offering a suggestion which didn't meet his views, his face became overcast and reproachful, as enjoining penance.

What a dinner! Specimens of all the fishes that swim in the sea, surely had swum their way to it, and if samples of the fishes of divers colours that made a speech in the Arabian Nights (quite a ministerial explanation in respect of cloudiness), and then jumped out of the frying-pan, were not to be recognized, it was only because they had all become of one hue by being cooked in batter among the whitebait. And the dishes being seasoned with Bliss—an article which they are sometimes out of, at Greenwich—were of perfect flavour, and the golden drinks had been bottled in the golden age and hoarding up their sparkles ever since.

The best of it was, that Bella and John and the cherub had made a covenant that they would not reveal to mortal eyes any appearance whatever of being a wedding party. Now, the supervising dignitary, the Archbishop of Greenwich, knew this as well as if he had performed the nuptial ceremony. And the loftiness with which his Grace entered into their confidence without being invited, and insisted on a show of keeping the waiters out of it, was the crowning glory of the entertainment.

There was an innocent young waiter of a slender form and with weakish legs, as yet unversed in the wiles of waiterhood, and but too evidently of a romantic temperament, and deeply (it were not too much to add hopelessly) in love with some young female not aware of his merit. This guileless youth, descrying the position of affairs, which even his innocence could not mistake, limited his waiting to languishing admiringly against the sideboard when Bella didn't want anything, and swooping at her when she did. Him, his Grace the Archbishop perpetually obstructed, cutting him out with his elbow in the moment

of success, despatching him in degrading quest of melted butter, and, when by any chance he got hold of any dish worth having, bereaving him of it, and ordering him to stand back.

"Pray excuse him, madam," said the Archbishop in a low stately voice; "he is a very young man on liking, and we *don't* like him."

This induced John Rokesmith to observe—by way of making the thing more natural—"Bella, my love, this is so much more successful than any of our past anniversaries, that I think we must keep our future anniversaries here."

Whereunto Bella replied, with probably the least successful attempt at looking matronly that ever was seen: "Indeed, I think so, John, dear."

Here the Archbishop of Greenwich coughed a stately cough to attract the attention of three of his ministers present, and staring at them, seemed to say: "I call upon you by your fealty to believe this!"

With his own hands he afterwards put on the dessert, as remarking to the three guests, "The period has now arrived at which we can dispense with the assistance of those fellows who are not in our confidence," and would have retired with complete dignity but for a daring action issuing from the misguided brain of the young man on liking. He finding, by ill-fortune, a piece of orange flower somewhere in the lobbies now approached undetected with the same in a finger-glass, and placed it on Bella's right hand. The Archbishop instantly ejected and excommunicated him; but the thing was done.

"I trust, madam," said his Grace, returning alone, "that you will have the kindness to overlook it, in consideration of its being the act of a very young man who is merely here on liking, and who will never answer."

With that, he solemnly bowed and retired, and they all burst into laughter, long and merry. "Disguise is of no use," said Bella; "they all find me out; I think it must be, Pa and John dear, because I look so happy!"

Her husband feeling it necessary at this point to demand one of those mysterious disappearances on Bella's part, she dutifully obeyed; saying in a softened voice from her place of concealment:

"You remember how we talked about the ships that day, Pa?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Isn't it strange, now, to think that there was no John in all the ships, Pa?"

"Not at all, my dear."

"Oh, Pa! Not at all?"

"No, my dear. How can we tell what coming people are aboard the ships that may be sailing to us now from the unknown seas!"

Bella remaining invisible and silent, her father remained at his dessert and wine, until he remembered it was time for him to get home to Holloway. "Though I positively cannot tear myself away," he cherubically added, "—it would be a sin—without drinking to many, many happy returns of this most happy day."

"Hear! ten thousand times!" cried John. "I fill my glass and my precious wife's."

"Gentlemen," said the cherub, inaudibly addressing, in his Anglo-Saxon tendency to throw his feelings into the form of a speech, the boys down below, who were bidding against each other to put their heads in the mud for sixpence: "Gentlemen—and Bella and John—you will readily suppose that it is not my intention to trouble you with many observations on the present occasion. You will also at once infer the nature and even the terms of the toast I am about to propose on the present occasion. Gentlemen—and Bella and John—the present occasion is an occasion fraught with feelings that I cannot trust myself to express. But gentlemen—and Bella and John—for the part I have had in it, for the confidence you have placed in me, and for the affectionate good-nature and kindness with which you have determined not to find me in the way, when I am well aware that I cannot be otherwise than in it more or less, I do most heartily thank you. Gentlemen—and Bella and John—my love to you, and may we meet, as on the present occasion, on many future occasions; that is to say, gentlemen—and Bella and John—on many happy returns of the present happy occasion."

Having thus concluded his address, the amiable cherub embraced his daughter, and took his flight to the steamboat which was to convey him to London, and was then lying at the floating pier, doing its best to bump the same to bits. But, the happy couple were not going to part with him in that way, and before he had been on board two minutes, there they were, looking down at him from the wharf above.

"Pa, dear!" cried Bella, beckoning him with her parasol to approach the side, and bending gracefully to whisper.

"Yes, my darling."

"Did I beat you much with that horrid little bonnet, Pa?"

"Nothing to speak of, my dear."

"Did I pinch your legs, Pa?"

"Only nicely, my pet."

"You are sure you quite forgive me, Pa? Please, Pa, please, forgive me quite!" Half laughing at him and half crying to him, Bella besought him in the prettiest manner; in a manner so engaging and so playful and so natural, that her cherubic parent made a coaxing face as if she had never grown up, and said, "What a silly little Mouse it is!"

"But you do forgive me that, and everything else; don't you, Pa?"

"Yes, my dearest."

"And you don't feel solitary or neglected, going away by yourself; do you, Pa?"

"Lord bless you! No, my Life!"

"Good-bye, dearest Pa. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, my darling! Take her away, my dear John. Take her home!"

So, she leaning on her husband's arm, they turned homeward by a rosy path which the gracious sun struck out for them in its setting. And O there are days in this life, worth life and worth death. And O what a bright old song it is, that O 'tis love, 'tis love, 'tis love, that makes the world go round!

IMPORTANT FAMILY MEDICINE.

CAMOMILE PILLS,

THE MOST CERTAIN PRESERVER OF HEALTH,

A MILD, YET SPEEDY, SAFE, AND

EFFECTUAL AID IN CASES OF INDIGESTION,

AND ALL STOMACH COMPLAINTS,

AND, AS A NATURAL CONSEQUENCE, A

PURIFIER OF THE BLOOD, AND A SWEETENER OF THE WHOLE SYSTEM.

INDIGESTION is a weakness or want of power of the digestive juices in the stomach to convert what we eat and drink into healthy matter, for the proper nourishment of the whole system. It is caused by everything which weakens the system in general, or the stomach in particular. From it proceed nearly all the diseases to which we are liable; for it is very certain, that if we could always keep the stomach right we should only die by old age or accident. Indigestion produces a great variety of unpleasant sensations: amongst the most prominent of its miserable effects are a want of, or an inordinate appetite, sometimes attended with a constant craving for drink, a distension or feeling of enlargement of the stomach, flatulency, heartburn, pains in the stomach, acidity, unpleasant taste in the mouth, perhaps sickness, rumbling noise in the bowels: in some cases of depraved digestion there is nearly a complete disrelish for food, but still the appetite is not greatly impaired, as at the stated period of meals persons so afflicted can eat heartily, although without much gratification; a long train of nervous symptoms are also frequent attendants, general debility, great languidness, and incapacity for exertion. The minds of persons so afflicted frequently become irritable and desponding, and great anxiety is observable in the countenance; they appear thoughtful, melancholy, and dejected, under great apprehension of some imaginary danger, will start at any unexpected noise or occurrence, and become so agitated that they require some time to calm and collect themselves: yet for all this the mind is exhilarated without much difficulty; pleasing events, society, will for a time dissipate all appearance of disease; but the excitement produced by an agreeable change vanishes soon after the cause has gone by. Other symptoms are, violent palpitations, restlessness, the sleep disturbed by frightful dreams and startings, and affording little or no refreshment; occasionally there is much moaning, with a sense of weight and oppression upon the chest, nightmare, &c.

It is almost impossible to enumerate all the symptoms of this first invader upon the constitution, as in a hundred cases of *Indigestion* there will probably be something peculiar to each; but, be they what they may, they are all occasioned by the food becoming a burden rather than a support to the stomach; and in all its stages the medicine most wanted is that which will afford speedy and effectual assistance to the digestive organs, and give energy to the nervous and muscular systems,—nothing can more speedily or with more certainty effect so desirable an object than *Norton's Extract of Camomile Flowers*. The herb has from time immemorial been highly esteemed in England as a grateful anodyne, imparting an aromatic bitter to the taste, and a pleasing degree of warmth and strength to the stomach; and in all cases of indigestion, gout in the stomach, windy colic, and general weakness, it has for ages been strongly recommended by the most eminent practitioners as very useful and beneficial. The

great, indeed only, objection to its use has been the large quantity of water which it takes to dissolve a small part of the flowers, and which must be taken with it into the stomach. It requires a quarter of a pint of boiling water to dissolve the soluble portion of one drachm of Camomile Flowers; and, when one or even two ounces may be taken with advantage, it must at once be seen how impossible it is to take a proper dose of this wholesome herb in the form of tea; and the only reason why it has not long since been placed the very first in rank of all restorative medicines is, that in taking it the stomach has always been loaded with water, which tends in a great measure to counteract, and very frequently wholly to destroy the effect. It must be evident that loading a weak stomach with a large quantity of water, merely for the purpose of conveying into it a small quantity of medicine, must be injurious; and that the medicine must possess powerful renovating properties only to counteract the bad effects likely to be produced by the water. Generally speaking, this has been the case with Camomile Flowers, a herb possessing the highest restorative qualities, and when properly taken, decidedly the most speedy restorer, and the most certain preserver of health.

NORTON'S CAMOMILE PILLS are prepared by a peculiar process, accidentally discovered, and known only to the proprietor, and which he firmly believes to be one of the most valuable modern discoveries in medicine, by which all the essential and extractive matter of more than an ounce of the flowers is concentrated in four moderate-sized pills. Experience has afforded the most ample proof that they possess all the fine aromatic and stomachic properties for which the herb has been esteemed; and, as they are taken into the stomach unencumbered by any diluting or indigestible substance, in the same degree has their benefit been more immediate and decided. Mild in their operation and pleasant in their effect, they may be taken at any age, and under any circumstance, without danger or inconvenience. A person exposed to cold and wet a whole day or night could not possibly receive any injury from taking them, but, on the contrary, they would effectually prevent a cold being taken. After a long acquaintance with and strict observance of the medicinal properties of *Norton's Camomile Pills*, it is only doing them justice to say, that they are really the most valuable of all TONIC MEDICINES. By the word tonic is meant a medicine which gives strength to the stomach sufficient to digest in proper quantities all wholesome food, which increases the power of every nerve and muscle of the human body, or, in other words, invigorates the nervous and muscular systems. The solidity or firmness of the whole tissue of the body which so quickly follows the use of *Norton's Camomile Pills*, their certain and speedy effects in repairing the partial dilapidations from time or intemperance, and their lasting salutary influence on the whole frame, is most convincing, that in the smallest compass is contained the largest quantity of the tonic principle, of so peculiar a nature as to pervade the whole system, through which it diffuses health and strength sufficient to resist the formation of disease, and also to fortify the constitution against contagion; as such, their general use is strongly recommended as a preventative during the prevalence of malignant fever or other infectious diseases, and to persons attending sick rooms they are invaluable, as in no one instance have they ever failed in preventing the taking of illness, even under the most trying circumstances.

As *Norton's Camomile Pills* are particularly recommended for all stomach complaints or indigestion, it will probably be expected that some advice should be given respecting diet, though after all that has been written upon the subject, after the publication of volume upon volume, after the country has, as it were, been inundated with practical essays on diet, as a means of prolonging life, it would be unnecessary to say more, did we not feel it our duty to make the humble endeavour of inducing the public to regard them not, but to adopt that course which is dictated by nature, by reason, and by common sense. Those persons who study the wholesomes, and are governed by the opinions of writers on diet, are uniformly both unhealthy in body and weak in mind. There can be no doubt that the palate is designed to inform us what is proper for the stomach, and of course that must best instruct us what food to take and what to avoid; we want no other adviser. Nothing can be more clear than that those articles which are agreeable to the taste were by nature intended for our food and sustenance, whether liquid or solid, foreign or of native

production : if they are pure and unadulterated, no harm need be dreaded by their use ; they will only injure by abuse. Consequently, whatever the palate approves, eat and drink always in moderation, but never in excess ; keeping in mind that the first process of digestion is performed in the mouth, the second in the stomach ; and that, in order that the stomach may be able to do its work properly, it is requisite the first process should be well performed ; this consists in masticating or chewing the solid food, so as to break down and separate the fibres and small substances of meat and vegetable, mixing them well, and blending the whole together before they are swallowed ; and it is particularly urged upon all to take plenty of time to their meals and never eat in haste. If you conform to this short and simple, but comprehensive advice, and find that there are various things which others eat and drink with pleasure and without inconvenience, and which would be pleasant to yourself only that they disagree, you may at once conclude that the fault is in the stomach, that it does not possess the power which it ought to do, that it wants assistance, and the sooner that assistance is afforded the better. A very short trial of this medicine will best prove how soon it will put the stomach in a condition to perform with ease all the work which nature intended for it. By its use you will soon be able to enjoy, in moderation, whatever is agreeable to the taste, and unable to name one individual article of food which disagrees with or sits unpleasantly on the stomach. Never forget that a small meal well digested affords more nourishment to the system than a large one, even of the same food, when digested imperfectly. Let the dish be ever so delicious, ever so enticing a variety offered, the bottle ever so enchanting, never forget that temperance tends to preserve health, and that health is the soul of enjoyment. But should an impropriety be at any time, or ever so often committed, by which the stomach becomes overloaded or disordered, render it immediate aid by taking a dose of *Norton's Camomile Pills*, which will so promptly assist in carrying off the burden thus imposed upon it that all will soon be right again.

It is most certainly true that every person in his lifetime consumes a quantity of noxious matter, which if taken at one meal would be fatal : it is these small quantities of noxious matter, which are introduced into our food, either by accident or wilful adulteration, which we find so often upset the stomach, and not unfrequently lay the foundation of illness, and perhaps final ruination to health. To preserve the constitution, it should be our constant care, if possible, to counteract the effect of these small quantities of unwholesome matter ; and whenever, in that way, an enemy to the constitution finds its way into the stomach, a friend should be immediately sent after it, which would prevent its mischievous effects, and expel it altogether ; no better friend can be found, nor one which will perform the task with greater certainty than NORTON'S CAMOMILE PILLS. And let it be observed that the longer this medicine is taken the less it will be wanted ; it can in no case become habitual, as its entire action is to give energy and force to the stomach, which is the spring of life, the source from which the whole frame draws its succour and support. After an excess of eating or drinking, and upon every occasion of the general health being at all disturbed, these PILLS should be immediately taken, as they will stop and eradicate disease at its commencement. Indeed, it is most confidently asserted, that by the timely use of this medicine only, and a common degree of caution, any person may enjoy all the comforts within his reach, may pass through life without an illness, and with the certainty of attaining a healthy OLD AGE.

On account of their volatile properties, they must be kept in bottles ; and if closely corked their qualities are neither impaired by time nor injured by any change of climate whatever. Price, 1 3½d. and 2s. 9d. each, with full directions. The large bottle contains the quantity of three small ones, or PILLS equal to fourteen ounces of CAMOMILE FLOWERS.

Sold by nearly all respectable Medicine Vendors.

Be particular to ask for "NORTON'S PILLS," and do not be persuaded to purchase an imitation.

A CLEAR COMPLEXION ! ! !

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EXTRACT OF ELDER FLOWERS

Is strongly recommended for Softening, Improving, Beautifying and Preserving the SKIN, and giving it a blooming and charming appearance. It will completely remove Tan, Sunburn, Redness, &c., and by its Balsamic and Healing qualities render the skin soft, pliable, and free from dryness, &c., clear it from every humour, pimple, or eruption, and by continuing its use only a short time, the skin will become and continue soft and smooth, and the complexion perfectly clear and beautiful.

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are a certain and safe remedy. They restore tranquillity to the nerves, give tone to the stomach, and strength to the whole system. No other medicine can be compared to these excellent Pills, as they prevent the disorder from attacking the stomach or head, and have restored thousands from pain and misery to health and comfort.

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12 pairs dessert knives & forks	3 10 0	5 0 0	5 10 0
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1 Mustard „	0 1 8
1 Pair sugar tongs	0 3 6
1 Gravy spoon	0 7 0
1 Butter knife	0 3 6
1 Soup ladle	0 8 0
1 Gravy spoon	0 7 0
2 Sauce ladles	0 8 0
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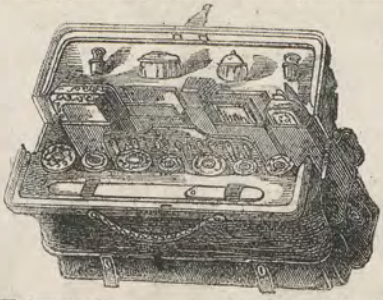

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