

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

VOLUME I.



THE BIRD OF PREY.

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARCUS STONE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193 PICCADILLY.


1865.

[The right of Translation is reserved.]

THIS BOOK
IS INSCRIBED BY ITS AUTHOR
TO
SIR JAMES EMERSON TENNENT
AS
A MEMORIAL OF FRIENDSHIP

Charlestown

Friday Seventeenth November, 1865.



CONTENTS.

BOOK THE FIRST. THE CUP AND THE LIP.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
ON THE LOOK OUT	1

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN FROM SOMEWHERE	4
----------------------------------	---

CHAPTER III.

ANOTHER MAN	13
-----------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

THE R. WILFER FAMILY	24
--------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

BOFFIN'S BOWER	33
--------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI.

CUT ADRIET	46
----------------------	----

CHAPTER VII.

MR. WEGG LOOKS AFTER HIMSELF	58
--	----

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. BOFFIN IN CONSULTATION	65
--------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IX.

MR. AND MRS. BOFFIN IN CONSULTATION	75
---	----

CHAPTER X.

A MARRIAGE CONTRACT	86
-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XI.		PAGE
PODSNAPPERY		97
CHAPTER XII.		
THE SWEAT OF AN HONEST MAN'S BROW		109
CHAPTER XIII.		
TRACKING THE BIRD OF PREY		121
CHAPTER XIV.		
THE BIRD OF PREY BROUGHT DOWN		129
CHAPTER XV.		
TWO NEW SERVANTS		135
CHAPTER XVI.		
MINDERS AND RE-MINDERS		145
CHAPTER XVII.		
A DISMAL SWAMP		157

BOOK THE SECOND. BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

CHAPTER I.		PAGE
OF AN EDUCATIONAL CHARACTER		161
CHAPTER II.		
STILL EDUCATIONAL		175
CHAPTER III.		
A PIECE OF WORK		184
CHAPTER IV.		
CUPID PROMPTED		193
CHAPTER V.		
MERCURY PROMPTING		203
CHAPTER VI.		
A RIDDLE WITHOUT AN ANSWER		214

CHAPTER VII.		PAGE
IN WHICH A FRIENDLY MOVE IS ORIGINATED		225
CHAPTER VIII.		
IN WHICH AN INNOCENT ELOPEMENT OCCURS		233
CHAPTER IX.		
IN WHICH THE ORPHAN MAKES HIS WILL		246
CHAPTER X.		
A SUCCESSOR		252
CHAPTER XI.		
SOME AFFAIRS OF THE HEART		257
CHAPTER XII.		
MORE BIRDS OF PREY		266
CHAPTER XIII.		
A SOLO AND A DUETT		278
CHAPTER XIV.		
STRONG OF PURPOSE		289
CHAPTER XV.		
THE WHOLE CASE SO FAR		299
CHAPTER XVI.		
AN ANNIVERSARY OCCASION		311

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO VOLUME I.

	PAGE
THE BIRD OF PREY	<i>To face Title</i>
WITNESSING THE AGREEMENT	30
AT THE BAR	48
MR. VENUS SURROUNDED BY THE TROPHIES OF HIS ART	61
THE BOFFIN PROGRESS	78
THE HAPPY PAIR	93
PODSNAPPERY	97
WAITING FOR FATHER	124
THE BIRD OF PREY BROUGHT DOWN	132
MRS. BOFFIN DISCOVERS AN ORPHAN	148
THE PERSON OF THE HOUSE AND THE BAD CHILD	182
BRINGING HIM IN	186
THE GARDEN ON THE ROOF	212
FORMING THE DOMESTIC VIRTUES	218
PA'S LODGER, AND PA'S DAUGHTER	235
OUR JOHNNY	248
MISS RIDERHOOD AT HOME	268
MORE DEAD THAN ALIVE	281
THE BOOPER LADY	298
A FRIEND IN NEED	308

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

In Four Books.

BOOK THE FIRST. THE CUP AND THE LIP.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE LOOK OUT.

IN these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise, a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two figures in it, floated on the Thames, between Southwark Bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone, as an autumn evening was closing in.

The figures in this boat were those of a strong man with ragged grizzled hair and a sun-browned face, and a dark girl of nineteen or twenty, sufficiently like him to be recognizable as his daughter. The girl rowed, pulling a pair of sculls very easily; the man, with the rudder-lines slack in his hands, and his hands loose in his waistband, kept an eager look out. He had no net, hook, or line, and he could not be a fisherman; his boat had no cushion for a sitter, no paint, no inscription, no appliance beyond a rusty boathook and a coil of rope, and he could not be a waterman; his boat was too crazy and too small to take in cargo for delivery, and he could not be a lighterman or river-carrier; there was no clue to what he looked for, but he looked for something, with a most intent and searching gaze. The tide, which had turned an hour before, was running down, and his eyes watched every little race and eddy in its broad sweep, as the boat made slight head-way against it, or drove stern foremost before it, according as he directed his daughter by a movement of his head. She watched his face as earnestly as he watched the river. But, in the intensity of her look there was a touch of dread or horror.

Allied to the bottom of the river rather than the surface, by reason of the slime and ooze with which it was covered, and its sodden state, this boat and the two figures in it obviously were doing something that they often did, and were seeking what they often sought. Half savage as the man showed, with no covering on his matted head, with his brown arms bare to between the elbow and the shoulder,

with the loose knot of a looser kerchief lying low on his bare breast in a wilderness of beard and whisker, with such dress as he wore seeming to be made out of the mud that begrimed his boat, still there was business-like usage in his steady gaze. So with every lithe action of the girl, with every turn of her wrist, perhaps most of all with her look of dread or horror; they were things of usage.

"Keep her out, Lizzie. Tide runs strong here. Keep her well afore the sweep of it."

Trusting to the girl's skill and making no use of the rudder, he eyed the coming tide with an absorbed attention. So the girl eyed him. But, it happened now, that a slant of light from the setting sun glanced into the bottom of the boat, and, touching a rotten stain there which bore some resemblance to the outline of a muffled human form, coloured it as though with diluted blood. This caught the girl's eye, and she shivered.

"What ails you?" said the man, immediately aware of it, though so intent on the advancing waters; "I see nothing afloat."

The red light was gone, the shudder was gone, and his gaze, which had come back to the boat for a moment, travelled away again. Wheresoever the strong tide met with an impediment, his gaze paused for an instant. At every mooring-chain and rope, at every stationary boat or barge that split the current into a broad-arrow-head, at the offsets from the piers of Southwark Bridge, at the paddles of the river steamboats as they beat the filthy water, at the floating logs of timber lashed together lying off certain wharves, his shining eyes darted a hungry look. After a darkening hour or so, suddenly the rudder-lines tightened in his hold, and he steered hard towards the Surrey shore.

Always watching his face, the girl instantly answered to the action in her sculling; presently the boat swung round, quivered as from a sudden jerk, and the upper half of the man was stretched out over the stern.

The girl pulled the hood of a cloak she wore, over her head and over her face, and, looking backward so that the front folds of this hood were turned down the river, kept the boat in that direction going before the tide. Until now, the boat had barely held her own, and had hovered about one spot; but now, the banks changed swiftly, and the deepening shadows and the kindling lights of London Bridge were passed, and the tiers of shipping lay on either hand.

It was not until now that the upper half of the man came back into the boat. His arms were wet and dirty, and he washed them over the side. In his right hand he held something, and he washed that in the river too. It was money. He chinked it once, and he blew upon it once, and he spat upon it once,—“for luck,” he hoarsely said—before he put it in his pocket.

"Lizzie!"

The girl turned her face towards him with a start, and rowed in silence. Her face was very pale. He was a hook-nosed man, and with that and his bright eyes and his ruffled head, bore a certain likeness to a roused bird of prey.

"Take that thing off your face."

She put it back.

"Here! and give me hold of the sculls. I'll take the rest of the spell."

"No, no, father! No! I can't indeed. Father!—I cannot sit so near it!"

He was moving towards her to change places, but her terrified expostulation stopped him and he resumed his seat.

"What hurt can it do you?"

"None, none. But I cannot bear it."

"It's my belief you hate the sight of the very river."

"I—I do not like it, father."

"As if it wasn't your living! As if it wasn't meat and drink to you!"

At these latter words the girl shivered again, and for a moment paused in her rowing, seeming to turn deadly faint. It escaped his attention, for he was glancing over the stern at something the boat had in tow.

"How can you be so thankless to your best friend, Lizzie? The very fire that warmed you when you were a baby, was picked out of the river alongside the coal barges. The very basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore. The very rockers that I put it upon to make a cradle of it, I cut out of a piece of wood that drifted from some ship or another."

Lizzie took her right hand from the scull it held, and touched her lips with it, and for a moment held it out lovingly towards him; then, without speaking, she resumed her rowing, as another boat of similar appearance, though in rather better trim, came out from a dark place and dropped softly alongside.

"In luck again, Gaffer?" said a man with a squinting leer, who sculled her and who was alone. "I know'd you was in luck again, by your wake as you come down."

"Ah!" replied the other, drily. "So you're out, are you?"

"Yes, pardner."

There was now a tender yellow moonlight on the river, and the new comer, keeping half his boat's length astern of the other boat, looked hard at its track.

"I says to myself," he went on, "directly you hove in view, Yonder's Gaffer, and in luck again, by George if he ain't! Scull it is, pardner—don't fret yourself—I didn't touch him." This was in answer to a quick impatient movement on the part of Gaffer: the speaker at the same time unshipping his scull on that side, and laying his hand on the gunwale of Gaffer's boat and holding to it.

"He's had touches enough not to want no more, as well as I make him out, Gaffer! Been a knocking about with a pretty many tides, ain't he pardner? Such is my out-of-luck ways, you see! He must have passed me when he went up last time, for I was on the look-out below bridge here. I a'most think you're like the vulturs, pardner, and scent 'em out."

He spoke in a dropped voice, and with more than one glance at Lizzie who had pulled on her hood again. Both men then looked with a weird unholy interest at the wake of Gaffer's boat.

"Easy does it, betwixt us. Shall I take him aboard, pardner?"

"No," said the other. In so surly a tone that the man, after a blank stare, acknowledged it with the retort:

"—Arn't been eating nothing as has disagreed with you, have you, pardner?"

"Why, yes, I have," said Gaffer. "I have been swallowing too much of that word, Pardner. I am no pardner of yours."

"Since when was you no pardner of mine, Gaffer Hexam Esquire?"

"Since you was accused of robbing a man. Accused of robbing a live man!" said Gaffer, with great indignation.

"And what if I had been accused of robbing a dead man, Gaffer?"

"You COULDN'T do it."

"Couldn't you, Gaffer?"

"No. Has a dead man any use for money? Is it possible for a dead man to have money? What world does a dead man belong to? 'Tother world. What world does money belong to? This world. How can money be a corpse's? Can a corpse own it, want it, spend it, claim it, miss it? Don't try to go confounding the rights and wrongs of things in that way. But it's worthy of the sneaking spirit that robs a live man."

"I'll tell you what it is——."

"No you won't. I'll tell you what it is. You've got off with a short time of it for putting your hand in the pocket of a sailor, a live sailor. Make the most of it and think yourself lucky, but don't think after that to come over *me* with your pardners. We have worked together in time past, but we work together no more in time present nor yet future. Let go. Cast off!"

"Gaffer! If you think to get rid of me this way——."

"If I don't get rid of you this way, I'll try another, and chop you over the fingers with the stretcher, or take a pick at your head with the boat-hook. Cast off! Pull you, Lizzie. Pull home, since you won't let your father pull."

Lizzie shot ahead, and the other boat fell astern. Lizzie's father, composing himself into the easy attitude of one who had asserted the high moralities and taken an unassailable position, slowly lighted a pipe, and smoked, and took a survey of what he had in tow. What he had in tow, lunged itself at him sometimes in an awful manner when the boat was checked, and sometimes seemed to try to wrench itself away, though for the most part it followed submissively. A neophyte might have fancied that the ripples passing over it were dreadfully like faint changes of expression on a sightless face; but Gaffer was no neophyte and had no fancies.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN FROM SOMEWHERE.

Mr. and Mrs. Veneering were bran-new people in a bran-new house in a bran-new quarter of London. Everything about the Veneerings was spiek and span new. All their furniture was new, all their friends were new, all their servants were new, their plate was new, their carriage was new, their harness was new, their horses