

every one of her adjectives she redoubled her kisses, and finally kissed his hat off, and then laughed immoderately when the wind took it and he ran after it.

When he had recovered his hat and his breath, and they were going on again once more, said her father then: "Number four, my dear?"

Bella's countenance fell in the midst of her mirth. "After all, perhaps I had better put off number four, Pa. Let me try once more, if for never so short a time, to hope that it may not really be so."

The change in her strengthened the cherub's interest in number four, and he said quietly: "May not be so, my dear? May not be how, my dear?"

Bella looked at him pensively, and shook her head.

"And yet I know right well it is so, Pa. I know it only too well."

"My love," returned her father, "you make me quite uncomfortable. Have you said No to anybody else, my dear?"

"No, Pa."

"Yes to anybody?" he suggested, lifting up his eyebrows.

"No, Pa."

"Is there anybody else who would take his chance between Yes and No, if you would let him, my dear?"

"Not that I know of, Pa."

"There can't be somebody who

won't take his chance when you want him to?" said the cherub, as a last resource.

"Why, of course not, Pa," said Bella, giving him another shake or two.

"No, of course not," he assented. "Bella, my dear, I am afraid I must either have no sleep to-night, or I must press for number four."

"Oh, Pa, there is no good in number four! I am so sorry for it, I am so unwilling to believe it, I have tried so earnestly not to see it, that it is very hard to tell, even to you. But Mr. Boffin is being spoilt by prosperity, and is changing every day."

"My dear Bella, I hope and trust not."

"I have hoped and trusted not too,

Pa; but every day he changes for the worse and for the worse. Not to me—he is always much the same to me—but to others about him. Before my eyes he grows suspicious, capricious, hard, tyrannical, unjust. If ever a good man were ruined by good fortune, it is my benefactor. And yet, Pa, think how terrible the fascination of money is! I see this, and hate this, and dread this, and don't know but that money might make a much worse change in me. And yet I have money always in my thoughts and my desires; and the whole life I place before myself is money, money, money, and what money can make of life!"

Thus, although a room of modest situation—for its windows gave on Silas Wegg's old corner—and of no pretensions to velvet, satin, or gilding, it had got itself established in a domestic position analogous to that of an easy dressing-gown or pair of slippers; and whenever the family wanted to enjoy a particularly pleasant fireside evening, they enjoyed it, as an institution that must be, in Mr. Boffin's room.

Mr. and Mrs. Boffin were reported sitting in this room, when Bella got back. Entering it, she found the Secretary there too; in official attendance it would appear, for he was standing with some papers in his hand by a table with shaded candles on it, at which Mr. Boffin was seated through back in his easy chair.

"You are busy, sir," said Bella, hesitating at the door.

"Not at all, my dear, not at all. You're one of ourselves. We never make company of you. Come in, come in. Here's the old lady in her usual place."

Mrs. Boffin adding her nod and a smile of welcome to Mr. Boffin's words, Bella took her book to a chair in the fireside corner, by Mrs. Boffin's work-table. Mr. Boffin's station was on the opposite side.

"Now, Rokesmith," said the Golden Dustman, so sharply rapping the table to bespeak his attention as Bella turned the leaves of her book, that she started; "where were we?"

"You were saying, sir," returned the Secretary, with an air of some reluctance and a glance towards those others who were present, "that you considered the time had come for fixing my salary."

"Don't be above calling it wages, man," said Mr. Boffin, testily. "What the deuce! I never talked of my salary when I was in service."

"My wages," said the Secretary, correcting himself.

"Rokesmith, you are not proud, I hope?" observed Mr. Boffin, eyeing him askance.

"I hope not, sir."

"Because I never was, when I was poor," said Mr. Boffin. "Poverty and pride don't go at all well together. Mind that. How can they go well together? Why it stands to reason. A man, being poor, has nothing to be proud of. It's common sense."

With a slight inclination of his head, and a look of some surprise, the Secretary seemed to assent by forming the syllables of the word "nonsense" on his lips.

"Now, concerning these same wages," said Mr. Boffin. "Sit down."

The Secretary sat down.

"Why didn't you sit down before?" asked Mr. Boffin, distrustfully. "I hope that wasn't pride? But about these wages. Now, I've gone into the matter, and I say two hundred a year. What do you think of it? Do you think it's enough?"

"Thank you. It is a fair proposal."

"I don't say, you know," Mr. Boffin stipulated, "but what it may be more than enough. And I'll tell you why, Rokesmith. A man of property, like me, is bound to consider the market-price. At first I didn't enter into that as much as I might have done; but I've got acquainted with other men of property since, and I've got acquainted with the duties of property. I mustn't go putting the market-price up, because money may happen not to be an object with me. A sheep is worth so much in the market, and I ought to give it and no more. A secretary is worth so much in the market, and I ought to give it and no more. However, I don't mind stretching a point with you."

"Mr. Boffin, you are very good," replied the Secretary, with an effort.

"Then we put the figure," said Mr. Boffin, "at two hundred a year. Then the figure's disposed of. Now, there must be no misunderstanding regarding what I buy for two hundred a year. If I pay for a sheep, I buy it out and out. Similarly, if I

## CHAPTER V.

### THE GOLDEN DUSTMAN FALLS INTO BAD COMPANY.

WERE Bella Wilfer's bright and ready little wits at fault, or was the Golden Dustman passing through the furnace of proof and coming out dross? Ill news travels fast. We shall know full soon.

On that very night of her return from the Happy Return, something chanced which Bella closely followed with her eyes and ears. There was

an apartment at the side of the Boffin mansion, known as Mr. Boffin's room. Far less grand than the rest of the house, it was far more comfortable, being pervaded by a certain air of homely snugness, which upholstery despotism had banished to that spot when it inexorably set its face against Mr. Boffin's appeals for mercy in behalf of any other chamber.

pay for a secretary, I buy *him* out and out."

"In other words, you purchase my whole time?"

"Certainly I do. Look here," said Mr. Boffin, "it ain't that I want to occupy your whole time; you can take up a book for a minute or two when you've nothing better to do, though I think you'll almost always find something useful to do. But I want to keep you in attendance. It's convenient to have you at all times ready on the premises. Therefore, betwixt your breakfast and your supper,—on the premises I expect to find you."

The Secretary bowed.

"In bygone days, when I was in service myself," said Mr. Boffin, "I couldn't go cutting about at my will and pleasure, and you won't expect to go cutting about at your will and pleasure. You've rather got into a habit of that, lately; but perhaps it was for want of a right specification betwixt us. Now, let there be a right specification betwixt us, and let it be this. If you want leave, ask for it."

Again the Secretary bowed. His manner was uneasy and astonished, and showed a sense of humiliation.

"I'll have a bell," said Mr. Boffin, "hung from this room to yours, and when I want you I'll touch it. I don't call to mind that I have anything more to say at the present moment."

The Secretary rose, gathered up his papers, and withdrew. Bella's eyes followed him to the door, lighted on Mr. Boffin complacently thrown back in his easy chair, and drooped over her book.

"I have let that chap, that young man of mine," said Mr. Boffin, taking a trot up and down the room, "get above his work. It won't do. I must have him down a peg. A man of property owes a duty to other men of property, and must look sharp after his inferiors."

Bella felt that Mrs. Boffin was not comfortable, and that the eyes of that good creature sought to discover from

her face what attention she had given to this discourse, and what impression it had made upon her. For which reason Bella's eyes drooped more engrossedly over her book, and she turned the page with an air of profound absorption in it.

"Noddy," said Mrs. Boffin, after thoughtfully pausing in her work.

"My dear," returned the Golden Dustman, stopping short in his trot.

"Excuse my putting it to you, Noddy, but now really! Haven't you been a little strict with Mr. Rokesmith to-night? Haven't you been a little—just a little little—not quite like your old self?"

"Why, old woman, I hope so," returned Mr. Boffin, cheerfully, if not boastfully.

"Hope so, deary?"

"Our old selves wouldn't do here, old lady. Haven't you found that out yet? Our old selves would be fit for nothing here but to be robbed and imposed upon. Our old selves weren't people of fortune; our new selves are; it's a great difference."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Boffin, pausing in her work again, softly to draw a long breath and to look at the fire. "A great difference."

"And we must be up to the difference," pursued her husband; "we must be equal to the change; that's what we must be. We've got to hold our own now, against everybody (for everybody's hand is stretched out to be dipped into our pockets), and we have got to recollect that money makes money, as well as makes everything else."

"Mentioning recollecting," said Mrs. Boffin, with her work abandoned, her eyes upon the fire, and her chin upon her hand, "do you recollect, Noddy, how you said to Mr. Rokesmith when he first came to see us at the Bower, and you engaged him—how you said to him that if it had pleased Heaven to send John Harmon to his fortune safe, we could have been content with the one Mound which was our legacy, and should never have wanted the rest?"

"Ay, I remember, old lady. But we hadn't tried what it was to have the rest then. Our new shoes had come home, but we hadn't put 'em on. We're wearing 'em now, we're wearing 'em, and must step out accordingly."

Mrs. Boffin took up her work again, and plied her needle in silence.

"As to Rokesmith, that young man of mine," said Mr. Boffin, dropping his voice and glancing towards the door with an apprehension of being overheard by some eavesdropper there, "it's the same with him as with the footmen. I have found out that you must either scrunch them, or let them scrunch you. If you ain't imperious with 'em, they won't believe in your being any better than themselves, if as good, after the stories (lies mostly) that they have heard of your beginnings. There's nothing betwixt stiffening yourself up, and throwing yourself away; take my word for that, old lady."

Bella ventured for a moment to look stealthily towards him under her eyelashes, and she saw a dark cloud of suspicion, covetousness, and conceit, overshadowing the once open face.

"Hows'ever," said he, "this isn't entertaining to Miss Bella. Is it, Bella?"

A deceiving Bella she was, to look at him with that pensively abstracted air, as if her mind were full of her book, and she had not heard a single word!

"Hah! Better employed than to attend to it," said Mr. Boffin. "That's right, that's right. Especially as you have no call to be told how to value yourself, my dear."

Colouring a little under this compliment, Bella returned, "I hope, sir, you don't think me vain?"

"Not a bit, my dear," said Mr. Boffin. "But I think it's very creditable in you, at your age, to be so well up with the pace of the world, and to know what to go in for. You are right. Go in for money, my love. Money's the article. You'll

make money of your good looks, and of the money Mrs. Boffin and me will have the pleasure of settling upon you, and you'll live and die rich. That's the state to live and die in!" said Mr. Boffin, in an unctuous manner. "R—r—rich!"

There was an expression of distress in Mrs. Boffin's face, as, after watching her husband's, she turned to their adopted girl, and said: "Don't mind him, Bella, my dear."

"Eh?" cried Mr. Boffin. "What! Not mind him?"

"I don't mean that," said Mrs. Boffin, with a worried look, "but I mean, don't believe him to be anything but good and generous, Bella, because he is the best of men. No, I must say that much, Noddy. You are always the best of men."

She made the declaration as if he were objecting to it: which assuredly he was not in any way.

"And as to you, my dear Bella," said Mrs. Boffin, still with that distressed expression, "he is so much attached to you, whatever he says, that your own father has not a truer interest in you and can hardly like you better than he does."

"Says too!" cried Mr. Boffin. "Whatever he says! Why, I say so, openly. Give me a kiss, my dear child, in saying Good Night, and let me confirm what my old lady tells you. I am very fond of you, my dear, and I am entirely of your mind, and you and I will take care that you shall be rich. These good looks of yours (which you have some right to be vain of, my dear, though you are not, you know) are worth money, and you shall make money of 'em. The money you will have, will be worth money, and you shall make money of that too. There's a golden ball at your feet. Good Night, my dear."

Somehow, Bella was not so well pleased with this assurance and this prospect as she might have been. Somehow, when she put her arms round Mrs. Boffin's neck and said Good Night, she derived a sense of

unworthiness from the still anxious face of that good woman and her obvious wish to excuse her husband. "Why, what need to excuse him?" thought Bella, sitting down in her own room. "What he said was very sensible, I am sure, and very true, I am sure. It is only what I often say to myself. Don't I like it then? No, I don't like it, and, though he is my liberal benefactor, I disparage him for it. Then pray," said Bella, sternly putting the question to herself in the looking-glass as usual, "what do you mean by this, you inconsistent little Beast?"

The looking-glass preserving a discreet ministerial silence when thus called upon for explanation, Bella went to bed with a weariness upon her spirit which was more than the weariness of want of sleep. And again in the morning, she looked for the cloud, and for the deepening of the cloud, upon the Golden Dustman's face.

She had begun by this time to be his frequent companion in his morning strolls about the streets, and it was at this time that he made her a party to his engaging in a curious pursuit. Having been hard at work in one dull enclosure all his life, he had a child's delight in looking at shops. It had been one of the first novelties and pleasures of his freedom, and was equally the delight of his wife. For many years their only walks in London had been taken on Sundays when the shops were shut; and when every day in the week became their holiday, they derived an enjoyment from the variety and fancy and beauty of the display in the windows, which seemed incapable of exhaustion. As if the principal streets were a great Theatre and the play were childishly new to them, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, from the beginning of Bella's intimacy in their house, had been constantly in the front row, charmed with all they saw, and applauding vigorously. But now Mr. Boffin's interest began to centre in book-shops; and more than that—

for that of itself would not have been much—in one exceptional kind of book.

"Look in here, my dear," Mr. Boffin would say, checking Bella's arm at a bookseller's window; "you can read at sight, and your eyes are as sharp as they're bright. Now, look well about you, my dear, and tell me if you see any book about a Miser."

If Bella saw such a book, Mr. Boffin would instantly dart in and buy it. And still, if they had not found it, they would seek out another book-shop, and Mr. Boffin would say, "Now, look well all round, my dear, for a Life of a Miser, or any book of that sort; any Lives of odd characters who may have been Misers."

Bella, thus directed, would examine the window with the greatest attention, while Mr. Boffin would examine her face. The moment she pointed out any book as being entitled Lives of eccentric personages, Anecdotes of strange characters, Records of remarkable individuals, or anything to that purpose, Mr. Boffin's countenance would light up, and he would instantly dart in and buy it. Size, price, quality, were of no account. Any book that seemed to promise a chance of miserly biography, Mr. Boffin purchased without a moment's delay and carried home. Happening to be informed by a bookseller that a portion of the Annual Register was devoted to "Characters," Mr. Boffin at once bought a whole set of that ingenious compilation, and began to carry it home piecemeal, confiding a volume to Bella, and bearing three himself. The completion of this labour occupied them about a fortnight. When the task was done, Mr. Boffin, with his appetite for Misers whetted instead of satiated, began to look out again.

It very soon became unnecessary to tell Bella what to look for, and an understanding was established between her and Mr. Boffin that she was always to look for Lives of Misers. Morning after morning they roamed about the town together,

pursuing this singular research. Miserly literature not being abundant, the proportion of failures to successes may have been as a hundred to one; still Mr. Boffin, never wearied, remained as avaricious for misers as he had been at the first onset. It was curious that Bella never saw the books about the house, nor did she ever hear from Mr. Boffin one word of reference to their contents. He seemed to save up his Misers as they had saved up their money. As they had been greedy for it, and secret about it, and had hidden it, so he was greedy for them, and secret about them, and hid them. But beyond all doubt it was to be noticed, and was by Bella very clearly noticed, that, as he pursued the acquisition of those dismal records with the ardour of Don Quixote for his books of chivalry, he began to spend his money with a more sparing hand. And often when he came out of a shop with some new account of one of those wretched lunatics, she would almost shrink from the sly dry chuckle with which he would take her arm again and trot away. It did not appear that Mrs. Boffin knew of this taste. He made no allusion to it, except in the morning walks when he and Bella were always alone; and Bella, partly under the impression that he took her into his confidence by implication, and partly in remembrance of Mrs. Boffin's anxious face that night, held the same reserve.

While these occurrences were in progress, Mrs. Lammle made the discovery that Bella had a fascinating influence over her. The Lammles, originally presented by the dear Venecings, visited the Boffins on all grand occasions, and Mrs. Lammle had not previously found this out; but now the knowledge came upon her all at once. It was a most extraordinary thing (she said to Mrs. Boffin); she was foolishly susceptible of the power of beauty, but it wasn't altogether that; she never had been able to resist a natural grace of manner, but it wasn't altogether that; it

was more than that, and there was no name for the indescribable extent and degree to which she was captivated by this charming girl.

This charming girl having the words repeated to her by Mrs. Boffin (who was proud of her being admired, and would have done anything to give her pleasure), naturally recognised in Mrs. Lammle a woman of penetration and taste. Responding to the sentiments, by being very gracious to Mrs. Lammle, she gave that lady the means of so improving her opportunity, as that the captivity became reciprocal, though always wearing an appearance of greater sobriety on Bella's part than on the enthusiastic Sophronia's. Howbeit, they were so much together that, for a time, the Boffin chariot held Mrs. Lammle oftener than Mrs. Boffin: a preference of which the latter worthy soul was not in the least jealous, placidly remarking, "Mrs. Lammle is a younger companion for her than I am, and Lor! she's more fashionable."

But between Bella Wilfer and Georgiana Podsnap there was this one difference, among many others, that Bella was in no danger of being captivated by Alfred. She distrusted and disliked him. Indeed, her perception was so quick, and her observation so sharp, that after all she mistrusted his wife too, though with her giddy vanity and wilfulness she squeezed the mistrust away into a corner of her mind, and blocked it up there.

Mrs. Lammle took the friendliest interest in Bella's making a good match. Mrs. Lammle said, in a sportive way, she really must show her beautiful Bella what kind of wealthy creatures she and Alfred had on hand, who would as one man fall at her feet enslaved. Fitting occasion made, Mrs. Lammle accordingly produced the most passable of those feverish, boastful, and indefinitely loose gentlemen who were always lounging in and out of the City on questions of the Bourse and Greek and Spanish and India and

possible *that* makes no impression on him?" Such questions Bella would propose to herself, often as many times in a day as there were hours in it. Impossible to know. Always the same fixed face.

"Can he be so base as to sell his very nature for two hundred a year?" Bella would think. And then, "But why not? It's a mere question of price with others besides him. I suppose I would sell mine, if I could get enough for it." And so she would come round again to the war with herself.

A kind of illegibility, though a different kind, stole over Mr. Boffin's face. Its old simplicity of expression got masked by a certain craftiness that assimilated even his good-humour to itself. His very smile was cunning, as if he had been studying smiles among the portraits of his misers. Saving an occasional burst of impatience, or coarse assertion of his mastery, his good-humour remained to him, but it had now a sordid alloy of distrust; and though his eyes should twinkle and all his face should laugh, he would sit holding himself in his own arms, as if he had an inclination to hoard himself up, and must always grudgingly stand on the defensive.

What with taking heed of these two faces, and what with feeling conscious that the stealthy occupation must set some mark on her own, Bella soon began to think that there was not a candid or a natural face among them all but Mrs. Boffin's. None the less because it was far less radiant than of yore, faithfully reflecting in its anxiety and regret every line of change in the Golden Dustman's.

"Rokesmith," said Mr. Boffin one evening when they were all in his room again, and he and the Secretary had been going over some accounts, "I am spending too much money. Or leastways, you are spending too much for me."

"You are rich, sir."

"I am not," said Mr. Boffin.

The sharpness of the retort was next to telling the Secretary that he lied. But it brought no change of expression into the set face.

"I tell you I am not rich," repeated Mr. Boffin, "and I won't have it."

"You are not rich, sir?" repeated the Secretary, in measured words.

"Well," returned Mr. Boffin, "if I am, that's my business. I am not going to spend at this rate, to please you, or anybody. You wouldn't like it, if it was your money."

"Even in that impossible case, sir, I—"

"Hold your tongue!" said Mr. Boffin. "You oughtn't to like it in any case. There! I didn't mean to be rude, but you put me out so, and after all I'm master. I didn't intend to tell you to hold your tongue. I beg your pardon. Don't hold your tongue. Only, don't contradict. Did you ever come across the life of Mr. Elwes?" referring to his favourite subject at last.

"The miser?"

"Ah, people called him a miser. People are always calling other people something. Did you ever read about him?"

"I think so."

"He never owned to being rich, and yet he might have bought me twice over. Did you ever hear of Daniel Dancer?"

"Another miser? Yes."

"He was a good 'un," said Mr. Boffin, "and he had a sister worthy of him. They never called themselves rich neither. If they *had* called themselves rich, most likely they wouldn't have been so."

"They lived and died very miserably. Did they not, sir?"

"No, I don't know that they did," said Mr. Boffin, curtly.

"Then they are not the Misers I mean. Those abject wretches—"

"Don't call names, Rokesmith," said Mr. Boffin.

"—That exemplary brother and sister—lived and died in the foulest and filthiest degradation."

"They pleased themselves," said

Mr. Boffin, "and I suppose they could have done no more if they had spent their money. But however, I ain't going to fling mine away. Keep the expenses down. The fact is, you ain't enough here, Rokesmith. It wants constant attention in the littlest things. Some of us will be dying in a workhouse next."

"As the persons you have cited," quietly remarked the Secretary, "thought they would, if I remember, sir."

"And very creditable in 'em too," said Mr. Boffin. "Very independent in 'em! But never mind them just now. Have you given notice to quit your lodgings?"

"Under your direction, I have, sir."

"Then I tell you what," said Mr. Boffin; "pay the quarter's rent—pay the quarter's rent, it'll be the cheapest thing in the end—and come here at once, so that you may be always on the spot, day and night, and keep the expenses down. You'll charge the quarter's rent to me, and we must try and save it somewhere. You've got some lovely furniture; haven't you?"

"The furniture in my rooms is my own."

"Then we shan't have to buy any for you. In case you was to think it," said Mr. Boffin, with a look of peculiar shrewdness, "so honourably independent in you as to make it a relief to your mind to make that furniture over to me in the light of a set-off against the quarter's rent, why ease your mind, ease your mind. I don't ask it, but I won't stand in your way if you should consider it due to yourself. As to your room, choose any empty room at the top of the house."

"Any empty room will do for me," said the Secretary.

"You can take your pick," said Mr. Boffin, "and it'll be as good as eight or ten shillings a week added to your income. I won't deduct for it; I look to you to make it up handsomely by keeping the expenses

down. Now, if you'll show a light, I'll come to your office-room and dispose of a letter or two."

On that clear, generous face of Mrs. Boffin's, Bella had seen such traces of a pang at the heart while this dialogue was being held, that she had not the courage to turn her eyes to it when they were left alone. Feigning to be intent on her embroidery, she sat plying her needle until her busy hand was stopped by Mrs. Boffin's hand being lightly laid upon it. Yielding to the touch, she felt her hand carried to the good soul's lips, and felt a tear fall on it.

"Oh, my loved husband!" said Mrs. Boffin. "This is hard to see and hear. But, my dear Bella, believe me that in spite of all the change in him, he is the best of men."

He came back, at the moment when Bella had taken the hand comfortingly between her own.

"Eh?" said he, mistrustfully looking in at the door. "What's she telling you?"

"She is only praising you, sir," said Bella.

"Praising me? You are sure? Not blaming me for standing on my own defence against a crew of plunderers, who would suck me dry by dribbles? Not blaming me for getting a little hoard together?"

He came up to them, and his wife folded her hands upon his shoulder, and shook her head as she laid it on her hands.

"There, there, there!" urged Mr. Boffin, not unkindly. "Don't take on, old lady."

"But I can't bear to see you so, my dear."

"Nonsense! Recollect we are not our old selves. Recollect, we must scrunch or be scrunched. Recollect, we must hold our own. Recollect, money makes money. Don't you be uneasy, Bella, my child; don't you be doubtful. The more I save, the more you shall have."

Bella thought it was well for his wife that she was musing with her

affectionate face on his shoulder; for there was a cunning light in his eyes as he said all this, which seemed to cast a disagreeable illumination on the change in him, and make it morally uglier.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE GOLDEN DUSTMAN FALLS INTO WORSE COMPANY.

It had come to pass that Mr. Silas Wegg now rarely attended the minion of fortune and the worm of the hour, at his (the worm's and minion's) own house, but lay under general instructions to await him within a certain margin of hours at the Bower. Mr. Wegg took this arrangement in great dudgeon, because the appointed hours were evening hours, and those he considered precious to the progress of the friendly move. But it was quite in character, he bitterly remarked to Mr. Venus, that the upstart who had trampled on those eminent creatures, Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker, should oppress his literary man.

The Roman Empire having worked out its destruction, Mr. Boffin next appeared in a cab with Rollin's Ancient History, which valuable work being found to possess lethargic properties, broke down, at about the period when the whole of the army of Alexander the Macedonian (at that time about forty thousand strong) burst into tears simultaneously, on his being taken with a shivering fit after bathing. The Wars of the Jews likewise languishing under Mr. Wegg's generalship, Mr. Boffin arrived in another cab with Plutarch: whose Lives he found in the sequel extremely entertaining, though he hoped Plutarch might not expect him to believe them all. What to believe, in the course of his reading, was Mr. Boffin's chief literary difficulty indeed; for some time he was divided in his mind between half, all, or none; at length, when he decided, as a moderate man, to com-

pound with half, the question still remained, which half? And that stumbling-block he never got over.

One evening, when Silas Wegg had grown accustomed to the arrival of his patron in a cab, accompanied by some profane historian charged with unutterable names of incomprehensible peoples, of impossible descent, waging wars any number of years and syllables long, and carrying illimitable hosts and riches about, with the greatest ease, beyond the confines of geography—one evening the usual time passed by, and no patron appeared. After half an hour's grace, Mr. Wegg proceeded to the outer gate, and there executed a whistle, conveying to Mr. Venus, if perchance within hearing, the tidings of his being at home and disengaged. Forth from the shelter of a neighbouring wall, Mr. Venus then emerged.

"Brother in arms," said Mr. Wegg, in excellent spirits, "welcome!"

In return, Mr. Venus gave him a rather dry good evening.

"Walk in, brother," said Silas, clapping him on the shoulder, "and take your seat in my chimney corner; for what says the ballad?"

'No malice to dread, sir,  
And no falsehood to fear,  
But truth to delight me, Mr. Venus,  
And I forgot what to cheer.  
Li toddle dee om dee.  
And something to guide,  
My ain fireside, sir,  
My ain fireside.'

With this quotation (depending for its neatness rather on the spirit than the words), Mr. Wegg conducted his guest to his hearth.

"And you come, brother," said Mr.