OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

IN FOUR BOOKS.—BOOK THE FIRST. THE CUP AND THE LIP.

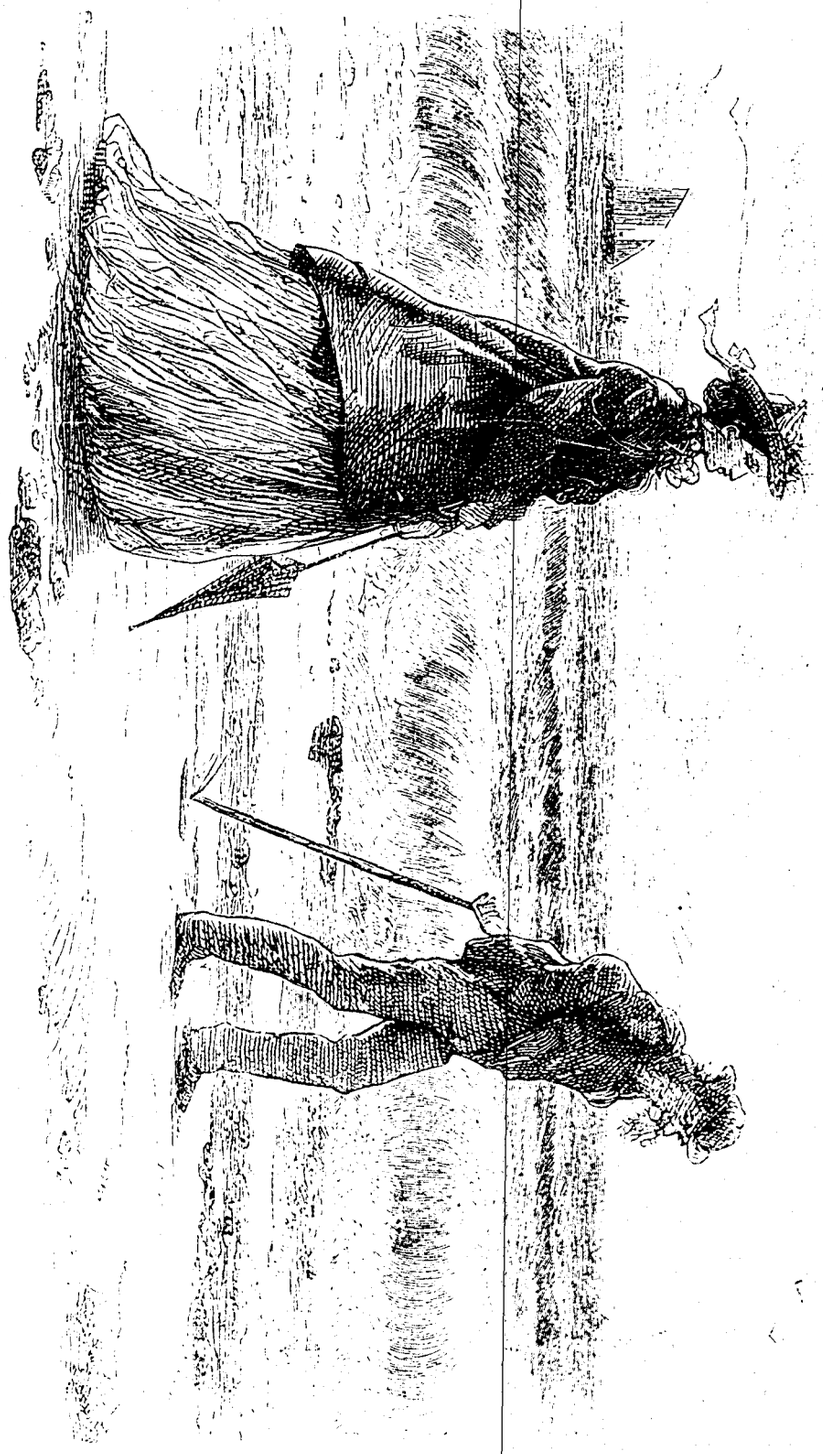
THE BOFFIN PROGRESS.—[SEE CHAPTER IX.]

CHAPTER XI.

PODSNAPPERY.

MR. PODSNAP was well to do, and stood very high in Mr. Podsnap's opinion. Beginning with a good inheritance, he had married a good inheritance, and had thriven exceedingly in the Marine Insurance way, and was quite satisfied. He never could make out why every body was not quite satisfied, and he felt conscious that he set a brilliant social example in being particularly well satisfied with most things, and, above all other things, with himself.

Thus happily acquainted with his own merits and importance, Mr. Podsnap settled that whatever he put behind him he put out of existence. There was a dignified conclusiveness—not to add a grand convenience—in this way of getting rid of disagreeables which had done much toward establishing Mr. Podsnap in his lofty place in Mr. Podsnap's satisfaction. "I don't want to



THE HAPPY PAIR.—[SEE CHAPTER XI.]

know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it!" Mr. Podsnap had even acquired a peculiar flourish of his right arm in often clearing the world of its most difficult problems, by sweeping them behind him (and consequently sheer away) with those words and a flushed face. For they affronted him.

Mr. Podsnap's world was not a very large world, morally; no, nor even geographically: seeing that although his business was sustained upon commerce with other countries, he considered other countries, with that important reservation, a mistake, and of their manners and customs would conclusively observe, "Not English!" when, PRESTO! with a flourish of the arm, and a flush of the face, they were swept away. Elsewise, the world got up at eight, shaved close at a quarter past, breakfasted at nine, went to the City at ten, came home at half past five, and dined at seven. Mr. Podsnap's notions of the Arts in their integrity might have been stated thus: Literature; large print, respectfully descriptive of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half past five, and dining at seven. Painting

and Sculpture; models and portraits representing Professors of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half past five, and dining at seven. Music; a respectable performance (without variations) on stringed and wind instruments, sedately expressive of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half past five, and dining at seven. Nothing else to be permitted to those same vagrants the Arts, on pain of excommunication. Nothing else To Be—any where!

As a so eminently respectable man, Mr. Podsnap was sensible of its being required of him to take Providence under his protection. Consequently he always knew exactly what Providence meant. Inferior and less respectable men might fall short of that mark, but Mr. Podsnap was always up to it. And it was very remarkable (and must have been very comfortable) that what Providence meant was invariably what Mr. Podsnap meant.

These may be said to have been the articles of a faith and school which the present chapter takes the liberty of calling, after its representative man, Podsnappery. They were confined within close bounds, as Mr. Podsnap's own head was confined by his shirt-collar; and they were enunciated with a sounding pomp that smacked of the creaking of Mr. Podsnap's own boots.

There was a Miss Podsnap. And this young rocking-horse was being trained in her mother's art of prancing in a stately manner without ever getting on. But the high parental action was not yet imparted to her, and in truth she was but an undersized damsel, with high shoulders, low spirits, chilled elbows, and a rasped surface of nose, who seemed to take occasional frosty peeps out of childhood into womanhood, and to shrink back again, overcome by her mother's head-dress and her father from head to foot—crushed by the mere dead-weight of Podsnappery.

A certain institution in Mr. Podsnap's mind which he called "the young person" may be considered to have been embodied in Miss Podsnap, his daughter. It was an inconvenient and exacting institution, as requiring every thing in the universe to be filed down and fitted to it. The question about every thing was, would it bring a blush into the cheek of the young person? And the inconvenience of the young person was, that, according to Mr. Podsnap, she seemed always liable to burst into blushes when there was no need at all. There appeared to be no line of demarkation between the young person's excessive innocence and another person's guiltiest knowledge. Take Mr. Podsnap's word for it, and the soberest tints of drab, white, lilac, and gray, were all flaming red to this troublesome Bull of a young person.

The Podsnaps lived in a shady angle adjoining Portman Square. They were a kind of people certain to dwell in the shade, wherever they dwelt. Miss Podsnap's life had been, from her first appearance on this planet, altogether of a shady order; for Mr. Podsnap's young person was likely to get little good out of association with other young persons, and had therefore been restricted to companionship with not very congenial older persons, and with massive furniture. Miss Podsnap's early views of life being principally derived from the reflections of it in her father's boots, and in the walnut and rosewood tables of the dim drawing-rooms, and in their swarthy giants of looking-glasses, were of a sombre cast; and it was not wonderful that now, when she was on most days solemnly tooled through the Park by the side of her mother in a great tall custard-colored phaeton, she showed above the apron of that vehicle like a dejected young person sitting up in bed to take a startled look at things in general, and very strongly desiring to get her head under the counterpane again.

Said Mr. Podsnap to Mrs. Podsnap, "Georgiana is almost eighteen."

Said Mrs. Podsnap to Mr. Podsnap, assenting, "Almost eighteen."

Said Mr. Podsnap then to Mrs. Podsnap, "Really I think we should have some people on Georgiana's birthday."

Said Mrs. Podsnap then to Mr. Podsnap, "Which will enable us to clear off all those people who are due."

So it came to pass that Mr. and Mrs. Podsnap requested the honor of the company of seventeen friends of their souls at dinner; and that they substituted other friends of their souls for such of the seventeen original friends of their souls as deeply regretted that a prior engagement prevented their having the honor of dining with Mr. and Mrs. Podsnap, in pursuance of their kind invitation; and that Mrs. Podsnap said of all these inconsolable personages, as she checked them off with a pencil in her list, "Asked, at any rate, and got rid of;" and that they successfully disposed of a good many friends of their souls in this way, and felt their consciences much lightened.

There were still other friends of their souls who were not entitled to be asked to dinner, but had a claim to be invited to come and take a haunch of mutton vapor-bath at half past nine. For the clearing off of these worthies, Mrs. Podsnap added a small and early evening to the dinner, and looked in at the music-shop to bespeak a well-conducted automaton to come and play quadrilles for a carpet dance.

Mr. and Mrs. Veneering, and Mr. and Mrs. Veneering's bran-new bride and bridegroom, were of the dinner company; but the Podsnap establishment had nothing else in common with the Veneerings. Mr. Podsnap could tolerate taste in a mushroom man who stood in need of that sort of thing, but was far above it himself. Hideous solidity was the characteristic of the Podsnap plate. Every thing was made to look as heavy as it could, and to take up as much

room as possible. Every thing said boastfully, "Here you have as much of me in my ugliness as if I were only lead; but I am so many ounces of precious metal worth so much an ounce;—wouldn't you like to melt me down?" A corpulent straddling epergne, blotched all over as if it had broken out in an eruption rather than been ornamented, delivered this address from an unsightly silver platform in the centre of the table. Four silver wine-coolers, each furnished with four staring heads, each head obtrusively carrying a big silver ring in each of its ears, conveyed the sentiment up and down the table, and handed it on to the pot-bellied silver salt-cellars. All the big silver spoons and forks widened the mouths of the company expressly for the purpose of thrusting the sentiment down their throats with every morsel they ate.

The majority of the guests were like the plate, and included several heavy articles weighing ever so much. But there was a foreign gentleman among them: whom Mr. Podsnap had invited after much debate with himself—believing the whole European continent to be in mortal alliance against the young person—and there was a droll disposition, not only on the part of Mr. Podsnap but of every body else, to treat him as if he were a child who was hard of hearing.

As a delicate concession to this unfortunately-born foreigner, Mr. Podsnap, in receiving him, had presented his wife as "Madame Podsnap;" also his daughter as "Mademoiselle Podsnap," with some inclination to add "ma fille," in which bold venture, however, he checked himself. The Veneerings being at that time the only other arrivals, he had added (in a condescendingly explanatory manner), "Monsieur Vey-nair-reeng," and had then subsided into English.

"How Do You Like London?" Mr. Podsnap now inquired from his station of host, as if he were administering something in the nature of a powder or potion to the deaf child; "London, Londres, London?"

The foreign gentleman admired it.

"You find it Very Large?" said Mr. Podsnap, spaciously.

The foreign gentleman found it very large.

"And Very Rich?"

The foreign gentleman found it, without doubt, enormément riche.

"Enormously Rich, We say," returned Mr. Podsnap, in a condescending manner. "Our English adverbs do Not terminate in Mong, and We Pronounce the 'ch' as if there were a 't' before it. We Say Ritch."

"Reetch," remarked the foreign gentleman.

"And Do You Find, Sir," pursued Mr. Podsnap, with dignity, "Many Evidences that Strike You, of our British Constitution in the Streets Of The World's Metropolis, London, Londres, London?"

The foreign gentleman begged to be pardoned, but did not altogether understand.

"The Constitution Britannique," Mr. Podsnap explained, as if he were teaching in an infant school. "We Say British, But You Say Britannique, You Know" (forgivingly, as if that were not his fault). "The Constitution, Sir."

The foreign gentleman said, "Mais, yees: I know eem."

A youngish sallowish gentleman in spectacles, with a lumpy forehead, seated in a supplementary chair at a corner of the table, here caused a profound sensation by saying, in a raised voice, "Esker," and then stopping dead.

"Mais oui," said the foreign gentleman, turning toward him. "Est-ce-que? Quoi donc?"

But the gentleman with the lumpy forehead having for the time delivered himself of all that he found behind his lumps, spake for the time no more.

"I Was Inquiring," said Mr. Podsnap, resuming the thread of his discourse, "Whether You Have Observed in our Streets as We should say, Upon our Pavvy as You would say, any Tokens—"

The foreign gentleman, with patient courtesy entreated pardon: "But what was tokenz?"

"Marks," said Mr. Podsnap; "Signs, you know, Appearances—Traces."

"Ah! Of a Orse?" inquired the foreign gentleman.

"We call it Horse," said Mr. Podsnap, with forbearance. "In England, Angleterre, England, We Aspirate the 'H,' and We Say 'Horse.' Only our Lower Classes Say 'Orse!'"

"Pardon," said the foreign gentleman; "I am alwiz wrong!"

"Our Language," said Mr. Podsnap, with a gracious consciousness of being always right, "is Difficult. Ours is a Copious Language, and Trying to Strangers. I will not Pursue my Question."

But the lumpy gentleman, unwilling to give it up, again madly said, "Esker," and again spake no more.

"It merely referred," Mr. Podsnap explained, with a sense of meritorious proprietorship, "to Our Constitution, Sir. We Englishmen are Very Proud of our Constitution, Sir. It Was Bestowed Upon Us By Providence. No Other Country is so Favored as This Country."

"And ozer countries?—" the foreign gentleman was beginning, when Mr. Podsnap put him right again.

"We do not say Ozer; we say Other: the letters are 'T' and 'H;' You say Tay and Aish, You Know; (still with clemency). The sound is 'th'—'th!'"

"And *oth*er countries," said the foreign gentleman. "They do how?"

"They do, Sir," returned Mr. Podsnap, gravely shaking his head; "they do—I am sorry to be obliged to say it—*as* they do."

"It was a little particular of Providence," said the foreign gentleman, laughing; "for the frontier is not large."

"Undoubtedly," assented Mr. Podsnap;

"But So it is. It was the Charter of the Land. This Island was Blest, Sir, to the Direct Exclusion of such Other Countries as—as there may happen to be. And if we were all Englishmen present, I would say," added Mr. Podsnap, looking round upon his compatriots, and sounding solemnly with his theme, "that there is in the Englishman a combination of qualities, a modesty, an independence, a responsibility, a repose, combined with an absence of every thing calculated to call a blush into the cheek of a young person, which one would seek in vain among the Nations of the Earth."

Having delivered this little summary, Mr. Podsnap's face flushed as he thought of the remote possibility of its being at all qualified by any prejudiced citizen of any other country; and, with his favorite right-arm flourish, he put the rest of Europe and the whole of Asia, Africa, and America nowhere.

The audience were much edified by this passage of words; and Mr. Podsnap, feeling that he was in rather remarkable force to-day, became smiling and conversational.

"Has any thing more been heard, Veneering," he inquired, "of the lucky legatee?"

"Nothing more," returned Veneering, "than that he has come into possession of the property. I am told people now call him The Golden Dustman. I mentioned to you some time ago, I think, that the young lady whose intended husband was murdered is daughter to a clerk of mine?"

"Yes, you told me that," said Podsnap; "and by-the-by, I wish you would tell it again here, for it's a curious coincidence—curious that the first news of the discovery should have been brought straight to your table (when I was there), and curious that one of your people should have been so nearly interested in it. Just relate that, will you?"

Veneering was more than ready to do it, for he had prospered exceedingly upon the Harmon Murder, and had turned the social distinction it conferred upon him to the account of making several dozen of bran-new bosom-friends. Indeed, such another lucky hit would almost have set him up in that way to his satisfaction. So, addressing himself to the most desirable of his neighbors, while Mrs. Veneering secured the next most desirable, he plunged into the case, and emerged from it twenty minutes afterward with a Bank Director in his arms. In the mean time, Mrs. Veneering had dived into the same waters for a wealthy Ship-Broker, and had brought him up, safe and sound, by the hair. Then Mrs. Veneering had to relate, to a larger circle, how she had been to see the girl, and how she was really pretty, and (considering her station) presentable. And this she did with such a successful display of her eight aquiline fingers, and their encircling jewels, that she happily laid hold of a drifting General Officer, his wife and daughter, and not only restored their animation which had become suspended, but made them lively friends within an hour.

Although Mr. Podsnap would in a general way have highly disapproved of Bodies in rivers as ineligible topics with reference to the cheek of the young person, he had, as one may say, a share in this affair which made him a part proprietor. As its returns were immediate, too, in the way of restraining the company from speechless contemplation of the wine-coolers, it paid, and he was satisfied.

And now the haunch of mutton vapor-bath having received a gamey infusion, and a few last touches of sweets and coffee, was quite ready, and the bathers came; but not before the discreet automaton had got behind the bars of the piano music-desk, and there presented the appearance of a captive languishing in a rosewood jail. And who now so pleasant or so well assorted as Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lammle, he all sparkle, she all gracious contentment, both at occasional intervals exchanging looks like partners at cards who played a game against All England.

There was not much youth among the bathers, but there was no youth (the young person always excepted) in the articles of Podsnappery. Bald bathers folded their arms and talked to Mr. Podsnap on the hearth-rug; sleek-whiskered bathers, with hats in their hands, lunged at Mrs. Podsnap and retreated; prowling bathers went about looking into ornamental boxes and bowls as if they had suspicions of larceny on the part of the Podsnaps, and expected to find something they had lost at the bottom: bathers of the gentler sex sat silently comparing ivory shoulders. All this time and always, poor little Miss Podsnap, whose tiny efforts (if she had made any) were swallowed up in the magnificence of her mother's rocking, kept herself as much out of sight and mind as she could, and appeared to be counting on many dismal returns of the day. It was somehow understood, as a secret article in the state proprieties of Podsnappery, that nothing must be said about the day. Consequently this young damsel's nativity was hushed up and looked over, as if it were agreed on all hands that it would have been better that she had never been born.

The Lammles were so fond of the dear Veneerings that they could not for some time detach themselves from those excellent friends; but at length, either a very open smile on Mr. Lammle's part, or a very secret elevation of one of his gingerous eyebrows—certainly the one or the other—seemed to say to Mrs. Lammle, "Why don't you play?" And so, looking about her, she saw Miss Podsnap, and seeming to say responsively, "That card?" and to be answered, "Yes," went and sat beside Miss Podsnap.

Mrs. Lammle was overjoyed to escape into a corner for a little quiet talk.

It promised to be a very quiet talk, for Miss Podsnap replied in a flutter, "Oh! Indeed,

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it's very kind of you, but I am afraid I *don't* talk."

"Let us make a beginning," said the insinuating Mrs. Lammle, with her best smile.

"Oh! I am afraid you'll find me very dull. But Ma talks!"

That was plainly to be seen, for Ma was talking then at her usual canter, with arched head and mane, opened eyes and nostrils.

"Fond of reading perhaps?"

"Yes. At least I—don't mind that so much," returned Miss Podsnap.

"M—m—m—m—music."

So insinuating was Mrs. Lammle that she got half a dozen ms into the word before she got it out.

"I haven't nerve to play even if I could. Ma plays."

(At exactly the same canter, and with a certain flourishing appearance of doing something, Ma did, in fact, occasionally take a rock upon the instrument.)

"Of course you like dancing?"

"Oh no, I don't," said Miss Podsnap.

"No? With your youth and attractions? Truly, my dear, you surprise me!"

"I can't say," observed Miss Podsnap, after hesitating considerably, and stealing several timid looks at Mrs. Lammle's carefully arranged face, "how I might have liked it if I had been a—you won't mention it, *will* you?"

"My dear! Never!"

"No, I am sure you won't. I can't say then how I should have liked it, if I had been a chimney-sweep on May-day."

"Gracious!" was the exclamation which amazement elicited from Mrs. Lammle.

"There! I knew you'd wonder. But you won't mention it, will you?"

"Upon my word, my love," said Mrs. Lammle, "you make me ten times more desirous, now I talk to you, to know you well than I was when I sat over yonder looking at you. How I wish we could be real friends! Try me as a real friend. Come! Don't fancy me a frumpy old married woman, my dear; I was married but the other day, you know; I am dressed as a bride now, you see. About the chimney-sweeps?"

"Hush! Ma'll hear."

"She can't hear from where she sits."

"Don't you be too sure of that," said Miss Podsnap, in a lower voice. "Well, what I mean is, that they seem to enjoy it."

"And that perhaps you would have enjoyed it, if you had been one of them?"

Miss Podsnap nodded significantly.

"Then you don't enjoy it now?"

"How is it possible?" said Miss Podsnap. "Oh it is such a dreadful thing! If I was wicked enough—and strong enough—to kill anybody, it should be my partner."

This was such an entirely new view of the Terpsichorean art as socially practiced, that Mrs. Lammle looked at her young friend in some astonishment. Her young friend sat nervously twiddling her fingers in a pinioned attitude, as if she were trying to hide her elbows. But this latter Utopian object (in short sleeves) always appeared to be the great inoffensive aim of her existence.

"It sounds horrid, don't it?" said Miss Podsnap, with a penitential face.

Mrs. Lammle, not very well knowing what to answer, resolved herself into a look of smiling encouragement.

"But it is, and it always has been," pursued Miss Podsnap, "such a trial to me! I so dread being awful. And it is so awful! No one knows what I suffered at Madame Sauteuse's, where I learned to dance and make presentation-courtesies, and other dreadful things—or at least where they tried to teach me. Ma can do it."

"At any rate, my love," said Mrs. Lammle, soothingly, "that's over."

"Yes, it's over," returned Miss Podsnap, "but there's nothing gained by that. It's worse here than at Madame Sauteuse's. Ma was there, and Ma's here: but Pa wasn't there, and company wasn't there, and there were not real partners there. Oh there's Ma speaking to the man at the piano! Oh there's Ma going up to somebody! Oh I know she's going to bring him to me! Oh please don't, please don't, please don't! Oh keep away, keep away, keep away!" These pious ejaculations Miss Podsnap uttered with her eyes closed, and her head leaning back against the wall.

But the Ogre advanced under the pilotage of Ma, and Ma said, "Georgiana, Mr. Grompus," and the Ogre clutched his victim and bore her off to his castle in the top couple. Then the discreet automaton who had surveyed his ground, played a blossomless tuneless "set," and sixteen disciples of Podsnappery went through the figures of—1, Getting up at eight and shaving close at a quarter past—2, Breakfasting at nine—3, Going to the City at ten—4, Coming home at half past five—5, Dining at seven, and the grand chain.

While these solemnities were in progress, Mr. Alfred Lammle (most loving of husbands) approached the chair of Mrs. Alfred Lammle (most loving of wives), and bending over the back of it, trifled for some few seconds with Mrs. Lammle's bracelet. Slightly in contrast with this brief airy toying, one might have noticed a certain dark attention in Mrs. Lammle's face as she said some words with her eyes on Mr. Lammle's waistcoat, and seemed in return to receive some lesson. But it was all done as a breath passes from a mirror.

And now, the grand chain riveted to the last link, the discreet automaton ceased, and the sixteen, two and two, took a walk among the furniture. And herein the unconsciousness of the Ogre Grompus was pleasantly conspicuous: for that complacent monster, believing that he was giving Miss Podsnap a treat, prolonged to the utmost stretch of possibility a peripatetic account of an archery meeting; while his victim, heading the procession of sixteen as it slowly circled about, like a revolving funeral, never raised her eyes except once to steal a glance at Mrs. Lammle expressive of intense despair.

At length the procession was dissolved by the violent arrival of a nutmeg, before which the drawing-room door bounced open as if it were a cannon-ball; and while that fragrant article, dispersed through several glasses of colored warm water, was going the round of society, Miss Podsnap returned to her seat by her new friend.

"Oh my goodness," said Miss Podsnap, "*That's* over! I hope you didn't look at me."

"My dear, why not?"

"Oh I know all about myself," said Miss Podsnap.

"I'll tell you something *I* know about you, my dear," returned Mrs. Lammle, in her winning way, "and that is, you are most unnecessarily shy."

"Ma ain't," said Miss Podsnap. "—I detest you! Go along!" This shot was levelled under her breath at the gallant Grompus for bestowing an insinuating smile upon her in passing.

"Pardon me if I scarcely see, my dear Miss Podsnap," Mrs. Lammle was beginning when the young lady interposed.

"If we are going to be real friends (and I suppose we are, for you are the only person who ever proposed it) don't let us be awful. It's awful enough to *be* Miss Podsnap without being called so. Call me Georgiana."

"Dearest Georgiana," Mrs. Lammle began again.

"Thank you," said Miss Podsnap.

"Dearest Georgiana, pardon me if I scarcely see, my love, why your mamma's not being shy is a reason why you should be."

"Don't you really see that?" asked Miss Podsnap, plucking at her fingers in a troubled manner, and furtively casting her eyes now on Mrs. Lammle, now on the ground. "Then perhaps it isn't?"

"My dearest Georgiana, you defer much too readily to my poor opinion. Indeed it is not even an opinion, darling, for it is only a confession of my dullness."

"Oh *you* are not dull," returned Miss Podsnap. "*I* am dull, but you couldn't have made me talk if you were."

Some little touch of conscience answering this perception of her having gained a purpose, called bloom enough into Mrs. Lammle's face to make it look brighter as she sat smiling her best smile on her dear Georgiana, and shaking her head with an affectionate playfulness. Not that it meant any thing, but that Georgiana seemed to like it.

"What I mean is," pursued Georgiana, "that Ma being so endowed with awfulness, and Pa being so endowed with awfulness, and there being so much awfulness every where—I mean, at least, every where where I am—perhaps it makes me who am so deficient in awfulness, and frightened at it—I say it very badly—I don't know whether you can understand what I mean?"

"Perfectly, dearest Georgiana!" Mrs. Lammle was proceeding with every reassuring wile, when the head of that young lady suddenly went back against the wall again and her eyes closed.

"Oh there's Ma being awful with somebody with a glass in his eye! Oh I know she's going to bring him here! Oh don't bring him, don't bring him! Oh he'll be my partner with his glass in his eye! Oh what shall I do!" This time Georgiana accompanied her ejaculations with taps of her feet upon the floor, and was altogether in quite a desperate condition. But there was no escape from the majestic Mrs. Podsnap's production of an ambling stranger, with one eye screwed up into extinction and the other framed and glazed, who, having looked down out of that organ, as if he descried Miss Podsnap at the bottom of some perpendicular shaft, brought her to the surface, and ambled off with her. And then the captive at the piano played another "set," expressive of his mournful aspirations after freedom, and other sixteen went through the former melancholy motions, and the ambler took Miss Podsnap for a furniture walk, as if he had struck out an entirely original conception.

In the mean time a stray personage of a meek demeanor, who had wandered to the hearth-rug and got among the heads of tribes assembled there in conference with Mr. Podsnap, eliminated Mr. Podsnap's flush and flourish by a highly unpolite remark; no less than a reference to the circumstance that some half-dozen people had lately died in the streets, of starvation. It was clearly ill-timed after dinner. It was not adapted to the cheek of the young person. It was not in good taste.

"I don't believe it," said Mr. Podsnap, putting it behind him.

The meek man was afraid we must take it as proved, because there were the Inquests and the Registrar's returns.

"Then it was their own fault," said Mr. Podsnap.

Veneering and other elders of tribes commended this way out of it. At once a short cut and a broad road.

The man of meek demeanor intimated that truly it would seem from the facts, as if starvation had been forced upon the culprits in question—as if, in their wretched manner, they had made their weak protests against it—as if they would have taken the liberty of staving it off if they could—as if they would rather not have been starved upon the whole, if perfectly agreeable to all parties.

"There is not," said Mr. Podsnap, flushing angrily, "there is not a country in the world, Sir, where so noble a provision is made for the poor as in this country."

The meek man was quite willing to concede that, but perhaps it rendered the matter even worse, as showing that there must be something appallingly wrong somewhere.

"Where?" said Mr. Podsnap.

The meek man hinted Wouldn't it be well to try, very seriously, to find out where?

"Ah!" said Mr. Podsnap. "Easy to say somewhere; not so easy to say where! But I see what you are driving at. I knew it from the first. Centralization. No. Never with my consent. Not English."

An approving murmur arose from the heads of tribes; as saying, "There you have him! Hold him!"

He was not aware (the meek man submitted of himself) that he was driving at any ization. He had no favorite ization that he knew of. But he certainly was more staggered by these terrible occurrences than he was by names, of howsoever so many syllables. Might he ask, was dying of destitution and neglect necessarily English?"

"You know what the population of London is, I suppose," said Mr. Podsnap.

The meek man supposed he did, but supposed that had absolutely nothing to do with it, if its laws were well administered.

"And you know; at least I hope you know;" said Mr. Podsnap, with severity, "that Providence has declared that you shall have the poor always with you?"

The meek man also hoped he knew that.

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Podsnap with a portentous air. "I am glad to hear it. It will render you cautious how you fly in the face of Providence."

In reference to that absurd and irreverent conventional phrase, the meek man said, for which Mr. Podsnap was not responsible, he the meek man had no fear of doing any thing so impossible; but—

But Mr. Podsnap felt that the time had come for flushing and flourishing this meek man down for good. So he said:

"I must decline to pursue this painful discussion. It is not pleasant to my feelings; it is repugnant to my feelings. I have said that I do not admit these things. I have also said that if they do occur (not that I admit it), the fault lies with the sufferers themselves. It is not for *me*"—Mr. Podsnap pointed "me" forcibly, as adding by implication though it may be all very well for *you*—"it is not for me to impugn the workings of Providence. I know better than that, I trust, and I have mentioned what the intentions of Providence are. Besides," said Mr. Podsnap, flushing high up among his hair-brushes, with a strong consciousness of personal affront, "the subject is a very disagreeable one. I will go so far as to say it is an odious one. It is not one to be introduced among our wives and young persons, and I—" He finished with that flourish of his arm which added more expressively than any words, And I remove it from the face of the earth.

Simultaneously with this quenching of the meek man's ineffectual fire, Georgiana having left the ambler up a lane of sofa, in a No Thoroughfare of back drawing-room, to find his own way out, came back to Mrs. Lammle. And who should be with Mrs. Lammle but Mr. Lammle. So fond of her!

"Alfred, my love, here is my friend. Georgiana, dearest girl, you must like my husband next to me."

Mr. Lammle was proud to be so soon distinguished by this special commendation to Miss Podsnap's favor. But if Mr. Lammle were prone to be jealous of his dear Sophronia's friendships, he would be jealous of her feeling toward Miss Podsnap.

"Say Georgiana, darling," interposed his wife.

"Toward — shall I? — Georgiana." Mr. Lammle uttered the name, with a delicate curve of his right hand, from his lips outward. "For never have I known Sophronia (who is not apt to take sudden likings) so attracted and so captivated as she is by—shall I once more?—Georgiana."

The object of this homage sat uneasily enough in receipt of it, and then said, turning to Mrs. Lammle, much embarrassed:

"I wonder what you like me for! I am sure I can't think."

"Dearest Georgiana, for yourself. For your difference from all around you."

"Well! That may be. For I think I like you for your difference from all around me," said Georgiana with a smile of relief.

"We must be going with the rest," observed Mrs. Lammle, rising with a show of unwillingness, amidst a general dispersal. "We are real friends, Georgiana dear?"

"Real."

"Good-night, dear girl!"

She had established an attraction over the shrinking nature upon which her smiling eyes were fixed, for Georgiana held her hand while she answered in a secret and half-frightened tone:

"Don't forget me when you are gone away. And come again soon. Good-night!"

Charming to see Mr. and Mrs. Lammle taking leave so gracefully, and going down the stairs so lovingly and sweetly. Not quite so charming to see their smiling faces fall and brood as they dropped moodily into separate corners of their little carriage. But to be sure that was a sight behind the scenes, which nobody saw, and which nobody was meant to see.

Certain big, heavy vehicles, built on the model of the Podsnap plate, took away the heavy articles of guests weighing ever so much; and the less valuable articles got away after their various manners; and the Podsnap plate was put to bed. As Mr. Podsnap stood with his back to the drawing-room fire, pulling up his shirt-collar, like a veritable cock of the walk literally pluming himself in the midst of his possessions, nothing would have astonished him more than an intimation that Miss Podsnap, or any other young person properly born and bred, could not be exactly put away like the plate, brought out like the plate, polished like the plate, counted, weighed, and valued like the plate. That such a young person could possibly have a morbid vacancy in the heart for any thing younger than the plate, or less monotonous than the plate; or that such a young person's thoughts could try to scale the region bounded on the north, south, east, and west, by the plate; was a monstrous imagination which he would on the spot have flourished into space. This perhaps in some sort arose from Mr. Podsnap's blushing young person being, so to speak, all cheek: whereas there is a possibility that there may be young persons of a rather more complex organization.

If Mr. Podsnap, pulling up his shirt-collar, could only have heard himself called "that fellow" in a certain short dialogue, which passed between Mr. and Mrs. Lammle in their opposite corners of their little carriage, rolling home!

"Sophronia, are you awake?"

"Am I likely to be asleep, Sir?"

"Very likely, I should think, after that fellow's company. Attend to what I am going to say."

"I have attended to what you have already said, have I not? What else have I been doing all to-night?"

"Attend, I tell you" (in a raised voice), "to what I am going to say. Keep close to that idiot girl. Keep her under your thumb. You have her fast, and you are not to let her go. Do you hear?"

"I hear you."

"I foresee there is money to be made out of this, besides taking that fellow down a peg. We owe each other money, you know."

Mrs. Lammle winced a little at the reminder, but only enough to shake her scents and essences anew into the atmosphere of the little carriage, as she settled herself afresh in her own dark corner.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SWEAT OF AN HONEST MAN'S BROW.

Mr. Mortimer Lightwood and Mr. Eugene Wrayburn took a coffee-house dinner together in Mr. Lightwood's office. They had newly agreed to set up a joint establishment together. They had taken a bachelor cottage near Hampton, on the brink of the Thames, with a lawn, and a boat-house, and all things fitting, and were to float with the stream through the summer and the Long Vacation.

It was not summer yet, but spring; and it was not gentle spring ethereally mild, as in Thomson's Seasons, but nipping spring with an easterly wind, as in Johnson's, Jackson's, Dickson's, Smith's, and Jones's Seasons. The grating wind sawed rather than blew; and as it sawed, the saw-dust whirled about the saw-pit. Every street was a saw-pit, and there were no top-sawyers; every passenger was an under-sawyer, with the saw-dust blinding him and choking him.

That mysterious paper currency which circulates in London when the wind blows, gyrated here and there and everywhere. Whence can it come, whither can it go? It hangs on every bush, flutters in every tree, is caught flying by the electric wires, haunts every inclosure, drinks at every pump, cowers at every grating, shudders upon every plot of grass, seeks rest in vain behind the legions of iron rails. In Paris, where nothing is wasted, costly and luxurious city though it be, but where wonderful human ants creep out of holes and pick up every scrap, there is no such thing. There, it blows nothing but dust. There, sharp eyes and sharp stomachs reap even the east wind, and get something out of it.

The wind sawed, and the saw-dust whirled. The shrubs wrung their many hands, bemoaning that they had been over-persuaded by the sun to bud; the young leaves pined; the sparrows repented of their early marriages, like men and women; the colors of the rainbow were discernible, not in floral spring, but in the faces of the people whom it nibbled and pinched. And ever the wind sawed, and the saw-dust whirled.

When the spring evenings are too long and light to shut out, and such weather is rife, the city which Mr. Podsnap so explanatorily called London, Londres, London, is at its worst. Such a black shrill city, combining the qualities of a smoky house and a scolding wife; such a gritty city; such a hopeless city, with no rent in the leaden canopy of its sky; such a beleaguered city, invested by the great Marsh Forces of Essex and Kent. So the two old school-fellows felt it to be, as, their dinner done, they turned toward the fire to smoke. Young Blight was gone, the coffee-house waiter was gone, the plates and dishes were gone, the wine was going—but not in the same direction.

"The wind sounds up here," quoth Eugene, stirring the fire, "as if we were keeping a light-house. I wish we were."

"Don't you think it would bore us?" Lightwood asked.

"Not more than any other place. And there would be no Circuit to go. But that's a selfish consideration, personal to me."

"And no clients to come," added Lightwood. "Not that that's a selfish consideration at all personal to *me*."

"If we were on an isolated rock in a stormy sea," said Eugene, smoking with his eyes on the fire, "Lady Tippins couldn't put off to visit us, or, better still, might put off and get swamped. People couldn't ask one to wedding breakfasts. There would be no Precedents to hammer at, except the plain-sailing Precedent of keeping the light up. It would be exciting to look out for wrecks."

"But otherwise," suggested Lightwood, "there might be a degree of sameness in the life."

"I have thought of that also," said Eugene, as if he really had been considering the subject in its various bearings with an eye to the business; "but it would be a defined and limited monotony. It would not extend beyond two people. Now, it's a question with me, Mortimer, whether a monotony defined with that precision and limited to that extent might not be more endurable than the unlimited monotony of one's fellow-creatures."

As Lightwood laughed and passed the wine he remarked, "We shall have an opportunity, in our boating summer, of trying the question."

"An imperfect one," Eugene acquiesced, with a sigh, "but so we shall. I hope we may not prove too much for one another."

"Now, regarding your respected father," said Lightwood, bringing him to a subject they had expressly appointed to discuss: always the most slippery eel of eels of subjects to lay hold of.

"Yes, regarding my respected father," assented Eugene, settling himself in his arm-chair. "I would rather have approached my respected father by candle-light, as a theme requiring a little artificial brilliancy; but we will take him by twilight, enlivened with a glow of Wallsend."