

with some trepidation of manner, "it might be as well not to mention it."

"Aha!" laughed Bella. "I know you wouldn't like it, Sir! So you keep my confidence, and I'll keep yours. But betray the lovely woman, and you shall find her a serpent. Now, you may give me a kiss, Pa, and I should like to give your hair a turn, because it has been dreadfully neglected in my absence."

R. W. submitted his head to the operator, and the operator went on talking; at the same time putting separate locks of his hair through a curious process of being smartly rolled over her two revolving forefingers, which were then suddenly pulled out of it in opposite lateral directions. On each of these occasions the patient winced and winked.

"I have made up my mind that I must have money, Pa. I feel that I can't beg it, borrow it, or steal it; and so I have resolved that I must marry it."

R. W. cast up his eyes toward her, as well as he could under the operating circumstances, and said in a tone of remonstrance, "My de-ar Bella!"

"Have resolved, I say, Pa, that to get money I must marry money. In consequence of which, I am always looking out for money to captivate."

"My de-a-r Bella!"

"Yes, Pa, that is the state of the case. If ever there was a mercenary plotter whose thoughts and designs were always in her mean occupation, I am the amiable creature. But I don't care. I hate and detest being poor, and I won't be poor if I can marry money. Now you are deliciously fluffy, Pa, and in a state to astonish the waiter and pay the bill."

"But, my dear Bella, this is quite alarming at your age."

"I told you so, Pa, but you wouldn't believe it," returned Bella, with a pleasant childish gravity. "Isn't it shocking?"

"It would be quite so, if you fully knew what you said, my dear, or meant it."

"Well, Pa, I can only tell you that I mean nothing else. Talk to me of love!" said Bella, contemptuously: though her face and figure certainly rendered the subject no incongruous one. "Talk to me of fiery dragons! But talk to me of poverty and wealth, and there indeed we touch upon realities."

"My De-ar, this is becoming Awful—" her father was emphatically beginning: when she stopped him.

"Pa, tell me. Did you marry money?"

"You know I didn't, my dear."

Bella hummed the Dead March in Saul, and said, after all it signified very little! But seeing him look grave and downcast, she took him round the neck and kissed him back to cheerfulness again.

"I didn't mean that last touch, Pa; it was only said in joke. Now mind! You are not to tell of me, and I'll not tell of you. And more than that; I promise to have no secrets from

you, Pa, and you may make certain that, whatever mercenary things go on, I shall always tell you all about them in strict confidence."

Fain to be satisfied with this concession from the lovely woman, R. W. rang the bell, and paid the bill. "Now, all the rest of this, Pa," said Bella, rolling up the purse when they were alone again, hammering it small with her little fist on the table, and cramming it into one of the pockets of his new waistcoat, "is for you, to buy presents with for them at home, and to pay bills with, and to divide as you like, and spend exactly as you think proper. Last of all take notice, Pa, that it's not the fruit of any avaricious scheme. Perhaps if it was, your little mercenary wretch of a daughter wouldn't make so free with it!"

After which, she tugged at his coat with both hands, and pulled him all askew in buttoning that garment over the precious waistcoat pocket, and then tied her dimples into her bonnet-strings in a very knowing way, and took him back to London. Arrived at Mr. Boffin's door, she set him with his back against it, tenderly took him by the ears as convenient handles for her purpose, and kissed him until he knocked muffled double knocks at the door with the back of his head. That done, she once more reminded him of their compact and gayly parted from him.

Not so gayly, however, but that tears filled her eyes as he went away down the dark street. Not so gayly, but that she several times said, "Ah, poor little Pa! Ah, poor dear struggling shabby little Pa!" before she took heart to knock at the door. Not so gayly, but that the brilliant furniture seemed to stare her out of countenance as if it insisted on being compared with the dingy furniture at home. Not so gayly, but that she fell into very low spirits sitting late in her own room, and very heartily wept, as she wished, now that the deceased old John Harmon had never made a will about her, now that the deceased young John Harmon had lived to marry her. "Contradictory things to wish," said Bella, "but my life and fortunes are so contradictory altogether, that what can I expect myself to be!"

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH THE ORPHAN MAKES HIS WILL.

THE Secretary, working in the Dismal Swamp betimes next morning, was informed that a youth waited in the hall who gave the name of Sloppy. The footman who communicated this intelligence made a decent pause before uttering the name, to express that it was forced on his reluctance by the youth in question, and that if the youth had had the good sense and good taste to inherit some other name it would have spared the feelings of him the bearer.

"Mrs. Boffin will be very well pleased," said the Secretary in a perfectly composed way. "Show him in."

Mr. Sloppy being introduced, remained close to the door: revealing in various parts of his form many surprising, confounding, and incomprehensible buttons.

"I am glad to see you," said John Rokesmith, in a cheerful tone of welcome. "I have been expecting you."

Sloppy explained that he had meant to come before, but that the Orphan (of whom he made mention as Our Johnny) had been ailing, and he had waited to report him well.

"Then he is well now?" said the Secretary.

"No he ain't," said Sloppy.

Mr. Sloppy having shaken his head to a considerable extent, proceeded to remark that he thought Johnny "must have took 'em from the Minders." Being asked what he meant, he answered, them that come out upon him and partickler his chest. Being requested to explain himself, he stated that there was some of 'em wot you couldn't kiver with a sixpence. Pressed to fall back upon a nominative case, he opined that they wos about as red as ever red could be. "But as long as they strikes out'ards, Sir," continued Sloppy, "they ain't so much. It's their striking in'ards that's to be kep off."

John Rokesmith hoped the child had had medical attendance? Oh yes, said Sloppy, he had been took to the doctor's shop once. And what did the doctor call it? Rokesmith asked him. After some perplexed reflection, Sloppy answered, brightening, "He called it something as wos wery long for spots." Rokesmith suggested measles. "No," said Sloppy, with confidence, "ever so much longer than *them*, Sir!" (Mr. Sloppy was elevated by this fact, and seemed to consider that it reflected credit on the poor little patient.)

"Mrs. Boffin will be sorry to hear this," said Rokesmith.

"Mrs. Higden said so, Sir, when she kep it from her, hoping as Our Johnny would work round."

"But I hope he will!" said Rokesmith, with a quick turn upon the messenger.

"I hope so," answered Sloppy. "It all depends on their striking in'ards." He then went on to say that whether Johnny had "took 'em" from the Minders, or whether the Minders had "took 'em" from Johnny, the Minders had been sent home and had "got 'em." Furthermore, that Mrs. Higden's days and nights being devoted to Our Johnny, who was never out of her lap, the whole of the mangling arrangements had devolved upon himself, and he had had "rather a tight time." The ungainly piece of honesty beamed and blushed as he said it, quite enraptured with the remembrance of having been serviceable.

"Last night," said Sloppy, "when I was a-turning at the wheel pretty late, the mangle seemed to go like Our Johnny's breathing. It begun beautiful, then as it went out it shook a little and got unsteady, then as it took the turn to come home it had a rattle-like and lumbered a bit, then it come smooth, and so it went on till

I scarce know'd which was mangle and which was Our Johnny. Nor Our Johnny, he scarce know'd either, for sometimes when the mangle lumbers he says, 'Me choking, Granny!' and Mrs. Higden holds him up in her lap and says to me, 'Bide a bit, Sloppy,' and we all stops together. And when our Johnny gets his breathing again, I turns again, and we all goes on together."

Sloppy had gradually expanded with his description into a stare and a vacant grin. He now contracted, being silent, into a half-repressed gush of tears, and, under pretense of being heated, drew the under part of his sleeve across his eyes with a singularly awkward, laborious, and roundabout smear.

"This is unfortunate," said Rokesmith. "I must go and break it to Mrs. Boffin. Stay you here, Sloppy."

Sloppy staid there, staring at the pattern of the paper on the wall, until the Secretary and Mrs. Boffin came back together. And with Mrs. Boffin was a young lady (Miss Bella Wilfer by name) who was better worth staring at, it occurred to Sloppy, than the best of wall-papering.

"Ah, my poor dear pretty little John Harmon!" exclaimed Mrs. Boffin.

"Yes, mum," said the sympathetic Sloppy.

"You don't think he is in a very, very bad way, do you?" asked the pleasant creature with her wholesome cordiality.

Put upon his good faith, and finding it in collision with his inclinations, Sloppy threw back his head and uttered a mellifluous howl, rounded off with a sniff.

"So bad as that!" cried Mrs. Boffin. "And Betty Higden not to tell me of it sooner!"

"I think she might have been mistrustful, mum," answered Sloppy, hesitating.

"Of what, for Heaven's sake?"

"I think she might have been mistrustful, mum," returned Sloppy, with submission, "of standing in Our Johnny's light. There's so much trouble in illness, and so much expense, and she's seen such a lot of its being objected to."

"But she never can have thought," said Mrs. Boffin, "that I would grudge the dear child any thing?"

"No, mum, but she might have thought (as a habit-like) of its standing in Johnny's light, and might have tried to bring him through it unbeknownst."

Sloppy knew his ground well. To conceal herself in sickness, like a lower animal; to creep out of sight and coil herself away and die, had become this woman's instinct. To catch up in her arms the sick child who was dear to her, and hide it as if it were a criminal, and keep off all ministration but such as her own ignorant tenderness and patience could supply, had become this woman's idea of maternal love, fidelity, and duty. The shameful accounts we read, every week in the Christian year, my lords and gen-

tle men and honorable boards, the infamous records of small official inhumanity, do not pass by the people as they pass by us. And hence these irrational, blind, and obstinate prejudices, so astonishing to our magnificence, and having no more reason in them—God save the Queen and Con—found their politics—no, than smoke has in coming from fire!

"It's not a right place for the poor child to stay in," said Mrs. Boffin. "Tell us, dear Mr. Rokesmith, what to do for the best."

He had already thought what to do, and the consultation was very short. He could pave the way, he said, in half an hour, and then they would go down to Brentford. "Pray take me," said Bella. Therefore a carriage was ordered, of capacity to take them all, and in the mean time Sloppy was regaled, feasting alone in the Secretary's room, with a complete realization of that fairy vision—meat, beer, vegetables, and pudding. In consequence of which his buttons became more importunate of public notice than before, with the exception of two or three about the region of the waistband, which modestly withdrew into a creasy retirement.

Punctual to the time appeared the carriage and the Secretary. He sat on the box, and Mr. Sloppy graced the rumble. So, to the Three Magpies as before: where Mrs. Boffin and Miss Bella were handed out, and whence they all went on foot to Mrs. Betty Higden's.

But, on the way down, they had stopped at a toy-shop, and had bought that noble charger, a description of whose points and trappings had on the last occasion conciliated the then worldly-minded orphan, and also a Noah's ark, and also a yellow bird with an artificial voice in him, and also a military doll so well dressed that if he had only been of life-size his brother-officers in the Guards might never have found him out. Bearing these gifts, they raised the latch of Betty Higden's door, and saw her sitting in the dimmest and furthest corner with poor Johnny in her lap.

"And how's my boy, Betty?" asked Mrs. Boffin, sitting down beside her.

"He's bad! he's bad!" said Betty. "I begin to be afeard he'll not be yours any more than mine. All others belonging to him have gone to the Power and the Glory, and I have a mind that they're drawing him to them—leading him away."

"No, no, no," said Mrs. Boffin.

"I don't know why else he clenches his little hand as if it had hold of a finger that I can't see. Look at it," said Betty, opening the wrappers in which the flushed child lay, and showing his small right hand lying closed upon his breast. "It's always so. It don't mind me."

"Is he asleep?"

"No, I think not. You're not asleep, my Johnny?"

"No," said Johnny, with a quiet air of pity for himself, and without opening his eyes.

"Here's the lady, Johnny. And the horse."

Johnny could bear the lady with complete indifference, but not the horse. Opening his heavy eyes, he slowly broke into a smile on beholding that splendid phenomenon, and wanted to take it in his arms. As it was much too big, it was put upon a chair where he could hold it by the mane and contemplate it. Which he soon forgot to do.

But, Johnny murmuring something with his eyes closed, and Mrs. Boffin not knowing what, old Betty bent her ear to listen and took pains to understand. Being asked by her to repeat what he had said, he did so two or three times, and then it came out that he must have seen more than they supposed when he looked up to see the horse, for the murmur was, "Who is the boofer lady?" Now, the boofer, or beautiful, lady was Bella; and whereas this notice from the poor baby would have touched her of itself, it was rendered more pathetic by the late melting of her heart to her poor little father, and their joke about the lovely woman. So, Bella's behavior was very tender and very natural when she kneeled on the brick floor to clasp the child, and when the child, with a child's admiration of what is young and pretty, fondled the boofer lady.

"Now, my good dear Betty," said Mrs. Boffin, hoping that she saw her opportunity, and laying her hand persuasively on her arm; "we have come to remove Johnny from this cottage to where he can be taken better care of."

Instantly, and before another word could be spoken, the old woman started up with blazing eyes, and rushed at the door with the sick child.

"Stand away from me every one of ye!" she cried out wildly. "I see what ye mean now. Let me go my way, all of ye. I'd sooner kill the Pretty, and kill myself!"

"Stay, stay!" said Rokesmith, soothing her. "You don't understand."

"I understand too well. I know too much about it, Sir. I've run from it too many a year. No! Never for me, nor for the child, while there's water enough in England to cover us!"

The terror, the shame, the passion of horror and repugnance, firing the worn face and perfectly maddening it, would have been a quite terrible sight, if embodied in one old fellow-creature alone. Yet it "crops up"—as our slang goes—my lords and gentlemen and honorable boards, in other fellow-creatures, rather frequently!

"It's been chasing me all my life, but it shall never take me nor mine alive!" cried old Betty. "I've done with ye. I'd have fastened door and window and starved out, afore I'd ever have let ye in, if I had known what ye came for!"

But, catching sight of Mrs. Boffin's wholesome face, she relented, and crouching down by the door and bending over her burden to hush it, said humbly: "Maybe my fears has put me wrong. If they have so, tell me, and the good Lord forgive me! I'm quick to take this fright,

I know, and my head is summ'at light with wearying and watching."

"There, there, there!" returned Mrs. Boffin. "Come, come! Say no more of it, Betty. It was a mistake, a mistake. Any one of us might have made it in your place, and felt just as you do."

"The Lord bless ye!" said the old woman, stretching out her hand.

"Now, see, Betty," pursued the sweet compassionate soul, holding the hand kindly, "what I really did mean, and what I should have begun by saying out, if I had only been a little wiser and handier. We want to move Johnny to a place where there are none but children; a place set up on purpose for sick children; where the good doctors and nurses pass their lives with children, talk to none but children, touch none but children, comfort and cure none but children."

"Is there really such a place?" asked the old woman, with a gaze of wonder.

"Yes, Betty, on my word, and you shall see it. If my home was a better place for the dear boy I'd take him to it; but indeed indeed it's not."

"You shall take him," returned Betty, fervently kissing the comforting hand, "where you will, my deary. I am not so hard but that I believe your face and voice, and I will, as long as I can see and hear."

This victory gained, Rokesmith made haste to profit by it, for he saw how woefully time had been lost. He dispatched Sloppy to bring the carriage to the door; caused the child to be carefully wrapped up; bade old Betty get her bonnet on; collected the toys, enabling the little fellow to comprehend that his treasures were to be transported with him; and had all things prepared so easily that they were ready for the carriage as soon as it appeared, and in a minute afterward were on their way. Sloppy they left behind, relieving his overcharged breast with a paroxysm of mangling.

At the Children's Hospital the gallant steed, the Noah's ark, the yellow bird, and the officer in the Guards, were made as welcome as their child-owner. But the doctor said aside to Rokesmith. "This should have been days ago. Too late!"

However, they were all carried up into a fresh airy room, and there Johnny came to himself, out of a sleep or a swoon or whatever it was, to find himself lying in a little quiet bed, with a little platform over his breast, on which were already arranged, to give him heart and urge him to cheer up, the Noah's ark, the noble steed, and the yellow bird; with the officer in the Guards doing duty over the whole, quite as much to the satisfaction of his country as if he had been upon Parade. And at the bed's head was a colored picture beautiful to see, representing as it were another Johnny seated on the knee of some Angel surely who loved little children. And, marvelous fact, to lie and stare at: John-

ny had become one of a little family, all in little quiet beds (except two playing dominoes in little arm-chairs at a little table on the hearth): and on all the little beds were little platforms whereon were to be seen dolls' houses, woolly dogs with mechanical barks in them not very dissimilar from the artificial voice pervading the bowels of the yellow bird, tin armies, Moorish tumblers, wooden tea-things, and the riches of the earth.

As Johnny murmured something in his placid admiration, the ministering women at his bed's head asked him what he said. It seemed that he wanted to know whether all these were brothers and sisters of his? So they told him yes. It seemed then that he wanted to know whether God had brought them all together there? So they told him yes again. They made out then that he wanted to know whether they would all get out of pain? So they answered yes to that question likewise, and made him understand that the reply included himself.

Johnny's powers of sustaining conversation were as yet so very imperfectly developed, even in a state of health, that in sickness they were little more than monosyllabic. But he had to be washed and tended, and remedies were applied, and though those offices were far, far more skillfully and lightly done than ever any thing had been done for him in his little life, so rough and short, they would have hurt and tired him but for an amazing circumstance which laid hold of his attention. This was no less than the appearance on his own little platform in pairs, of All Creation, on its way into his own particular ark: the elephant leading, and the fly, with a diffident sense of its size, politely bringing up the rear. A very little brother lying in the next bed with a broken leg, was so enchanted by this spectacle that his delight exalted its enthralling interest; and so came rest and sleep.

"I see you are not afraid to leave the dear child here, Betty," whispered Mrs. Boffin.

"No, ma'am. Most willingly, most thankfully, with all my heart and soul."

So they kissed him, and left him there, and old Betty was to come back early in the morning, and nobody but Rokesmith knew for certain how that the doctor had said "This should have been days ago. Too late!"

But, Rokesmith knowing it, and knowing that his bearing it in mind would be acceptable thereafter to that good woman who had been the only light in the childhood of desolate John Harmon dead and gone, resolved that late at night he would go back to the bedside of John Harmon's namesake, and see how it fared with him.

The family whom God had brought together were not all asleep, but were all quiet. From bed to bed a light womanly tread and a pleasant fresh face passed in the silence of the night. A little head would lift itself up into the softened light here and there, to be kissed as the face went by—for these little patients are very loving—and would then submit itself to be composed

to rest again. The mite with the broken leg was restless, and moaned; but after a while turned his face toward Johnny's bed, to fortify himself with a view of the ark, and fell asleep. Over most of the beds the toys were yet grouped as the children had left them when they last laid themselves down, and, in their innocent grotesqueness and incongruity, they might have stood for the children's dreams.

The doctor came in too, to see how it fared with Johnny. And he and Rokesmith stood together, looking down with compassion on him.

"What is it, Johnny?" Rokesmith was the questioner, and put an arm round the poor baby as he made a struggle.

"Him!" said the little fellow. "Those!"

The doctor was quick to understand children, and, taking the horse, the ark, the yellow bird, and the man in the Guards, from Johnny's bed, softly placed them on that of his next neighbor, the mite with the broken leg.

With a weary and yet a pleased smile, and with an action as if he stretched his little finger out to rest, the child heaved his body on the sustaining arm, and seeking Rokesmith's face with his lips, said:

"A kiss for the boofer lady."

Having now bequeathed all he had to dispose of, and arranged his affairs in this world, Johnny, thus speaking, left it.

CHAPTER X.

A SUCCESSOR.

SOME of the Reverend Frank Milvey's brethren had found themselves exceedingly uncomfortable in their minds, because they were required to bury the dead too hopefully. But, the Reverend Frank, inclining to the belief that they were required to do one or two other things (say out of nine-and-thirty) calculated to trouble their consciences rather more if they would think as much about them, held his peace.

Indeed, the Reverend Frank Milvey was a forbearing man, who noticed many sad warps and blights in the vineyard wherein he worked, and did not profess that they made him savagely wise. He only learned that the more he himself knew, in his little limited human way, the better he could distantly imagine what Omniscience might know.

Wherefore, if the Reverend Frank had had to read the words that troubled some of his brethren, and profitably touched innumerable hearts, in a worse case than Johnny's, he would have done so out of the pity and humility of his soul. Reading them over Johnny, he thought of his own six children, but not of his poverty, and read them with dimmed eyes. And very seriously did he and his bright little wife, who had been listening, look down into the small grave and walk home arm-in-arm.

There was grief in the aristocratic house, and

there was joy in the Bower. Mr. Wegg argued, if an orphan were wanted, was he not an orphan himself, and could a better be desired? And why go beating about Brentford bushes, seeking orphans forsooth who had established no claims upon you and made no sacrifices for you, when here was an orphan ready to your hand who had given up in your cause Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker?

Mr. Wegg chuckled, consequently, when he heard the tidings. Nay, it was afterward affirmed by a witness who shall at present be nameless, that in the seclusion of the Bower he poked out his wooden leg, in the stage-ballet manner, and executed a taunting or triumphant pirouette on the genuine leg remaining to him.

John Rokesmith's manner toward Mrs. Boffin at this time was more the manner of a young man toward a mother than that of a Secretary toward his employer's wife. It had always been marked by a subdued affectionate deference that seemed to have sprung up on the very day of his engagement; whatever was odd in her dress or her ways had seemed to have no oddity for him; he had sometimes borne a quietly-amused face in her company, but still it had seemed as if the pleasure her genial temper and radiant nature yielded him could have been quite as naturally expressed in a tear as in a smile. The completeness of his sympathy with her fancy for having a little John Harmon to protect and rear, he had shown in every act and word, and now that the kind fancy was disappointed, he treated it with a manly tenderness and respect for which she could hardly thank him enough.

"But I do thank you, Mr. Rokesmith," said Mrs. Boffin, "and I thank you most kindly. You love children."

"I hope every body does."

"They ought," said Mrs. Boffin; "but we don't all of us do what we ought; do us?"

John Rokesmith replied, "Some among us supply the shortcomings of the rest. You have loved children well, Mr. Boffin has told me."

"Not a bit better than he has, but that's his way; he puts all the good upon me. You speak rather sadly, Mr. Rokesmith."

"Do I?"

"It sounds to me so. Were you one of many children?"

He shook his head.

"An only child?"

"No, there was another. Dead long ago."

"Father or mother alive?"

"Dead."

"And the rest of your relations?"

"Dead—if I ever had any living. I never heard of any."

At this point of the dialogue Bella came in with a light step. She paused at the door a moment, hesitating whether to remain or retire; perplexed by finding that she was not observed.

"Now, don't mind an old lady's talk," said Mrs. Boffin, "but tell me. Are you quite sure,