He said it with such a lively—almost angry—flash, that Mortimer showed himself greatly surprised.

"You think this thumped head of mine is excited?" Eugene went on, with a high look; "not so, believe me. I can say to you of the healthful music of my pulse what Hamlet said of his. My blood is up, but wholesomely up, when I think of it. Tell me! Shall I turn coward to Lizzie, and sneak away with her, as if I were ashamed of her! Where would your friend's part in this world be, Mortimer, if she had turned coward to him, and on immeasurably better occasion?"

"Honorable and stanch," said Lightwood. "And yet, Eugene—"

"And yet what, Mortimer?"

"And yet, are you sure that you might not feel (for her sake, I say for her sake) any slight coldness toward her on the part of—Society?"

"Oh! You and I may well stumble at the word," returned Eugene, laughing. "Do we mean our Tippins?"

"Perhaps we do," said Mortimer, laughing also.

"Faith, we DO!" returned Eugene, with great animation. "We may hide behind the bush and beat about it, but we DO! Now, my wife is something nearer to my heart, Mortimer, than Tippins is, and I owe her a little more than I owe to Tippins, and I am rather prouder of her than I ever was of Tippins. Therefore, I will fight it out to the last gasp, with her and for her, here, in the open field. When I hide her, or strike for her, faint-heartedly, in a hole or a corner, do you, whom I love next best upon earth, tell me what I shall most righteously deserve to be told:—that she would have done well to turn me over with her foot that night when I lay bleeding to death, and spat in my dastard face."

The glow that shone upon him as he spoke the words so irradiated his features that he looked, for the time, as though he had never been mutilated. His friend responded as Eugene would have had him respond, and they discoursed of the future until Lizzie came back. After resuming her place at his side, and tenderly touching his hands and his head, she said:

"Eugene, dear, you made me go out, but I ought to have staid with you. You are more flushed than you have been for many days. What have you been doing?"

"Nothing," replied Eugene, "but looking forward to your coming back."

"And talking to Mr. Lightwood," said Lizzie, turning to him with a smile. "But it can not have been Society that disturbed you."

"Faith, my dear love!" retorted Eugene, in his old airy manner, as he laughed and kissed her, "I rather think it *was* Society, though!"

The word ran so much in Mortimer Lightwood's thoughts as he went home to the Temple that night, that he resolved to take a look at Society, which he had not seen for a considerable period.

CHAPTER THE LAST.

THE VOICE OF SOCIETY.

BEHOOVES Mortimer Lightwood, therefore, to answer a dinner card from Mr. and Mrs. Veneering requesting the honor, and to signify that Mr. Mortimer Lightwood will be happy to have the other honor. The Veneerings have been, as usual, indefatigably dealing dinner cards to Society, and whoever desires to take a hand had best be quick about it, for it is written in the Books of the Insolvent Fates that Veneering shall make a resounding smash next week. Yes. Having found out the clew to that great mystery how people can contrive to live beyond their means, and having over-jobbed his jobberies as legislator deputed to the Universe by the pure electors of Pocket Breeches, it shall come to pass next week that Veneering will accept the Chiltern Hundreds, that the legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence will again accept the Pocket Breeches Thousands, and that the Veneerings will retire to Calais, there to live on Mrs. Veneering's diamonds (in which Mr. Veneering, as a good husband, has from time to time invested considerable sums), and to relate to Neptune and others, how that, before Veneering retired from Parliament, the House of Commons was composed of himself and the six hundred and fifty-seven dearest and oldest friends he had in the world. It shall likewise come to pass, at as nearly as possible the same period, that Society will discover that it always did despise Veneering, and distrust Veneering, and that when it went to Veneering's to dinner it always had misgivings—though very secretly at the time, it would seem, and in a perfectly private and confidential manner.

The next week's books of the Insolvent Fates, however, being not yet opened, there is the usual rush to the Veneerings, of the people who go to their house to dine with one another and not with them. There is Lady Tippins. There are Podsnap the Great and Mrs. Podsnap. There is Twemlow. There are Buffer, Boots, and Brewer. There is the Contractor, who is Providence to five hundred thousand men. There is the Chairman, traveling three thousand miles per week. There is the brilliant genius who turned the shares into that remarkably exact sum of three hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds, no shillings, and no pence.

To whom add Mortimer Lightwood, coming in among them with a reassumption of his old languid air, founded on Eugene, and belonging to the days when he told the story of the man from Somewhere.

That fresh fairy, Tippins, all but screams at sight of her false swain. She summons the deserter to her with her fan; but the deserter, predetermined not to come, talks Britain with Podsnap. Podsnap always talks Britain, and talks as if he were a sort of Private Watchman employed, in the British interests, against the rest of the world. "We know what Russia means,

Sir," says Podsnap; "we know what France wants; we see what America is up to; but we know what England is. That's enough for us."

However, when dinner is served, and Lightwood drops into his old place over against Lady Tippins, she can be fended off no longer. "Long banished Robinson Crusoe," says the charmer, exchanging salutations, "how did you leave the Island?"

"Thank you," says Lightwood. "It made no complaint of being in pain any where."

"Say, how did you leave the savages?" asks Lady Tippins.

"They were becoming civilized when I left Juan Fernandez," says Lightwood. "At least they were eating one another, which looked like it."

"Tormentor!" returns the dear young creature. "You know what I mean, and you trifle with my impatience. Tell me something, immediately, about the married pair. You were at the wedding."

"Was I, by-the-by?" Mortimer pretends, at great leisure, to consider. "So I was!"

"How was the bride dressed? In rowing costume?"

Mortimer looks gloomy, and declines to answer.

"I hope she steered herself, skiffed herself, paddled herself, larboarded and starboarded herself, or whatever the technical term is, to the ceremony?" continues the playful Tippins.

"However she got to it she graced it," says Mortimer.

Lady Tippins with a skittish little scream attracts the general attention. "Graced it! Take care of me if I faint, Veneering. He means to tell us that a horrid female waterman is graceful!"

"Pardon me. I mean to tell you nothing, Lady Tippins," replies Lightwood. And keeps his word by eating his dinner with a show of the utmost indifference.

"You shall not escape me in this way, you morose backwoods-man," retorts Lady Tippins. "You shall not evade the question, to screen your friend Eugene who has made this exhibition of himself. The knowledge shall be brought home to you that such a ridiculous affair is condemned by the voice of Society. My dear Mrs. Veneering, do let us resolve ourselves into a Committee of the whole House on the subject."

Mrs. Veneering, always charmed by this rattling sylph, cries: "Oh yes! Do let us resolve ourselves into a Committee of the whole House! So delicious!" Veneering says, "As many as are of that opinion, say Aye—contrary, No—the Ayes have it." But nobody takes the slightest notice of his joke.

"Now, I am Chairwoman of Committees!" cries Lady Tippins.

("What spirits she has!" exclaims Mrs. Veneering; to whom likewise nobody attends.)

"And this," pursues the sprightly one, "is a Committee of the whole House to what-you-may-call-it—elicit, I suppose—the voice of Society. The question before the Committee is, whether a young man of very fair family, good appearance, and some talent, makes a fool or a wise man of himself in marrying a female waterman, turned factory girl."

"Hardly so, I think," the stubborn Mortimer strikes in. "I take the question to be, whether such a man as you describe, Lady Tippins, does right or wrong in marrying a brave woman (I say nothing of her beauty), who has saved his life, with a wonderful energy and address; whom he knows to be virtuous and possessed of remarkable qualities; whom he has long admired, and who is deeply attached to him."

"But, excuse me," says Podsnap, with his temper and his shirt-collar about equally rumpled; "was this young woman ever a female waterman?"

"Never. But she sometimes rowed in a boat with her father, I believe."

General sensation against the young woman. Brewer shakes his head. Boots shakes his head. Buffer shakes his head.

"And now, Mr. Lightwood, was she ever," pursues Podsnap, with his indignation rising high into those hair-brushes of his, "a factory girl?"

"Never. But she had some employment in a paper mill, I believe."

General sensation repeated. Brewer says, "Oh dear!" Boots says, "Oh dear!" Buffer says, "Oh dear!" All, in a rumbling tone of protest.

"Then all *I* have to say is," returns Podsnap, putting the thing away with his right arm, "that my gorge rises against such a marriage—that it offends and disgusts me—that it makes me sick—and that I desire to know no more about it."

("Now I wonder," thinks Mortimer, amused, "whether *you* are the voice of Society!")

"Hear, hear, hear!" cries Lady Tippins. "Your opinion of this *mésalliance*, honorable colleague of the honorable member who has just sat down?"

Mrs. Podsnap is of opinion that in these matters there should be an equality of station and fortune, and that a man accustomed to Society should look out for a woman accustomed to Society and capable of bearing her part in it with—an ease and elegance of carriage—that—" Mrs. Podsnap stops there, delicately intimating that every such man should look out for a fine woman as nearly resembling herself as he may hope to discover.

("Now I wonder," thinks Mortimer, "whether *you* are the Voice!")

Lady Tippins next canvasses the Contractor, of five hundred thousand power. It appears to this potentate, that what the man in question should have done, would have been, to buy the young woman a boat and a small annuity, and set her up for herself. These things are a question of beef-steaks and porter. You buy the young woman a boat. Very good. You buy her, at the same time, a small annuity. You speak of that annuity in pounds sterling, but it is in reality so many pounds of beef-steaks and so

many pints of porter. On the one hand, the young woman has the boat. On the other hand, she consumes so many pounds of beef-steaks and so many pints of porter. Those beef-steaks and that porter are the fuel to that young woman's engine. She derives therefrom a certain amount of power to row the boat; that power will produce so much money; and thus you get at the young woman's income. That (it seems to the Contractor) is the way of looking at it.

The fair enslaver having fallen into one of her gentle sleeps during this last exposition, nobody likes to wake her. Fortunately, she comes awake of herself, and puts the question to the Wandering Chairman. The Wanderer can only speak of the case as if it were his own. If such a young woman as the young woman described, had saved his own life, he would have been very much obliged to her, wouldn't have married her, and would have got her a berth in an Electric Telegraph Office, where young women answer very well.

What does the Genius of the three hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds, no shillings, and no pence, think? He can't say what he thinks, without asking: Had the young woman any money?

"No," says Lightwood, in an uncompromising voice; "no money."

"Madness and moonshine," is then the compressed verdict of the Genius. "A man may do any thing lawful, for money. But for no money?—Bosh!"

What does Boots say?

Boots says he wouldn't have done it under twenty thousand pound.

What does Brewer say?

Brewer says what Boots says.

What does Buffer say.

Buffer says he knows a man who married a bathing-woman, and bolted.

Lady Tippins fancies she has collected the suffrages of the whole Committee (nobody dreaming of asking the Veneerings for their opinion), when, looking round the table through her eyeglass, she perceives Mr. Twemlow with his hand to his forehead.

Good gracious! My Twemlow forgotten! My dearest! My own! What is his vote?

Twemlow has the air of being ill at ease, as he takes his hand from his forehead and replies.

"I am disposed to think," says he, "that this is a question of the feelings of a gentleman."

"A gentleman can have no feelings who contracts such a marriage," flushes Podsnap.

"Pardon me, Sir," says Twemlow, rather less mildly than usual, "I don't agree with you. If this gentleman's feelings of gratitude, of respect, of admiration, and affection, induced him (as I presume they did) to marry this lady—"

"This lady!" echoes Podsnap.

"Sir," returns Twemlow, with his wristbands bristling a little, "*you* repeat the word. *I* repeat the word. This lady. What else would you call her if the gentleman were present?"

This being something in the nature of a poser for Podsnap, he merely waves it away with a speechless wave.

"I say," resumes Twemlow, "if such feelings on the part of this gentleman induced this gentleman to marry this lady, I think he is the greater gentleman for the action, and makes her the greater lady. I beg to say, that when I use the word gentleman, I use it in the sense in which the degree may be attained by any man. The feelings of a gentleman I hold sacred, and I confess I am not comfortable when they are made the subject of sport or general discussion."

"I should like to know," sneers Podsnap, "whether your noble relation would be of your opinion."

"Mr. Podsnap," retorts Twemlow, "permit me. He might be, or he might not be. I can not say. But I could not allow even him to dictate to me on a point of great delicacy, on which I feel very strongly."

Somehow a canopy of wet blanket seems to descend upon the company, and Lady Tippins was never known to turn so very greedy or so very cross. Mortimer Lightwood alone brightens. He has been asking himself, as to every other member of the Committee in turn, "I wonder whether you are the Voice!" But he does not ask himself the question after Twemlow has spoken, and he glances in Twemlow's direction as if he were grateful. When the company disperse—by which time Mr. and Mrs. Veneering have had quite as much as they want of the honor, and the guests have had quite as much as *they* want of the other honor—Mortimer sees Twemlow home, shakes hands with him cordially at parting, and fares to the Temple, gayly.

POSTSCRIPT,

IN LIEU OF PREFACE.

When I devised this story, I foresaw the likelihood that a class of readers and commentators would suppose that I was at great pains to conceal exactly what I was at great pains to suggest: namely, that Mr. John Harmon was not slain, and that Mr. John Rokesmith was he. Pleasing myself with the idea that the supposition might in part arise out of some ingenuity in the story, and thinking it worth while, in the interests of art, to hint to an audience that an artist (of whatever denomination) may perhaps be trusted to know what he is about in his vocation, if they will concede him a little patience, I was not alarmed by the anticipation.

To keep for a long time unsuspected, yet always working itself out, another purpose originating in that leading incident, and turning it to a pleasant and useful account at last, was at once the most interesting and the most difficult part of my design. Its difficulty was much enhanced by the mode of publication; for it would be very unreasonable to expect that many read-