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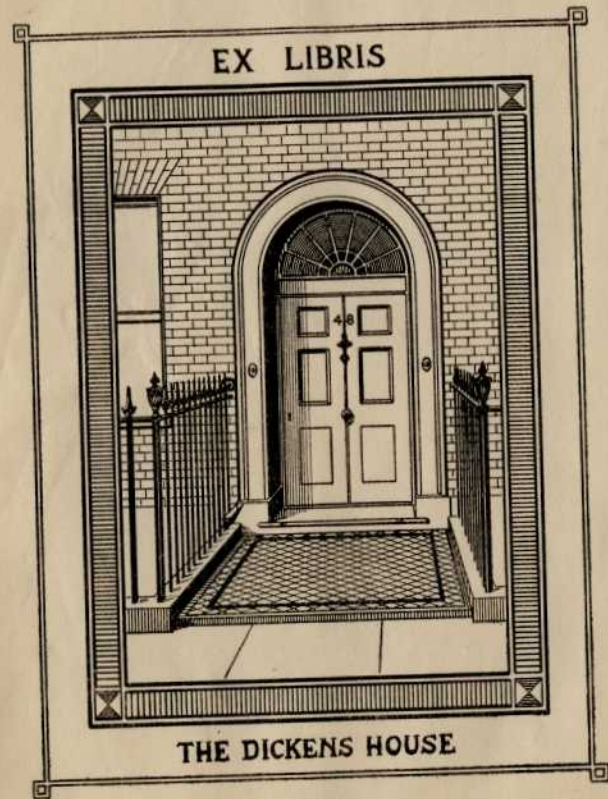
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CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Boffin in Consultation.

WHOSOEVER had gone out of Fleet Street into the Temple at the date of this history, and had wandered disconsolate about the Temple until he stumbled on a dismal churchyard, and had looked up at the dismal windows commanding that churchyard until at the most dismal window of them all he saw a dismal boy, would in him have beheld, at one grand comprehensive swoop of the eye, the managing clerk, junior clerk, common-law clerk, conveyancing clerk, chancery clerk, every refinement and department of clerk, of Mr. Mortimer Lightwood, erewhile called in the newspapers eminent solicitor.

Mr. Boffin having been several times in communication with this clerkly essence, both on its own ground and at the Bower, had no difficulty in identifying it when he saw it up in its dusty eyrie. To the second floor on which the window was situated, he ascended, much pre-occupied in mind by the uncertainties besetting the Roman Empire, and much regretting the death of the amiable Pertinax: who only last night had left the Imperial affairs in a state of great confusion, by falling a victim to the fury of the prætorian guards.

"Morning, morning, morning!" said Mr. Boffin, with a wave of his hand, as the office door was opened by



THE HAPPY PAIR.

the dismal boy, whose appropriate name was Blight. "Governor in?"

"Mr. Lightwood gave you an appointment, sir, I think?"

"I don't want him to give it, you know," returned Mr. Boffin; "I'll pay my way, my boy."

"No doubt, sir. Would you walk in? Mr. Lightwood ain't in at the present moment, but I expect him back very shortly. Would you take a seat in Mr. Lightwood's room, sir, while I look over our Appointment Book?" Young Blight made a great show of fetching from his desk a long thin manuscript volume with a brown paper cover, and running his finger down the day's appointments, murmuring, "Mr. Aggs, Mr. Baggs, Mr. Caggs, Mr. Daggs, Mr. Faggs, Mr. Gaggs, Mr. Boffin. Yes, sir; quite right. You are a little before your time, sir. Mr. Lightwood will be in directly."

"I'm not in a hurry," said Mr. Boffin.

"Thank you, sir. I'll take the opportunity, if you please, of entering your name in our Callers' Book for the day." Young Blight made another great show of changing the volume, taking up a pen, sucking it, dipping it, and running over previous entries before he wrote. As, "Mr. Alley, Mr. Balley, Mr. Calley, Mr. Dalley, Mr. Falley, Mr. Galley, Mr. Halley, Mr. Lalley, Mr. Malley. And Mr. Boffin."

"Strict system here; eh, my lad?" said Mr. Boffin, as he was booked.

"Yes, sir," returned the boy. "I couldn't get on without it."

By which he probably meant that his mind would have been shattered to pieces without this fiction of an

occupation. Wearing in his solitary confinement no fetters that he could polish, and being provided with no drinking-cup that he could carve, he had fallen on the device of ringing alphabetical changes into the two volumes in question, or of entering vast numbers of persons out of the Directory as transacting business with Mr. Lightwood. It was the more necessary for his spirits, because, being of a sensitive temperament, he was apt to consider it personally disgraceful to himself that his master had no clients.

"How long have you been in the law, now?" asked Mr. Boffin, with a pounce, in his usual inquisitive way.

"I've been in the law, now, sir, about three years."

"Must have been as good as born in it!" said Mr. Boffin, with admiration. "Do you like it?"

"I don't mind it much," returned Young Blight, heaving a sigh, as if its bitterness were past.

"What wages do you get?"

"Half what I could wish," replied young Blight.

"What's the whole that you could wish?"

"Fifteen shillings a week," said the boy.

"About how long might it take you now, at an average rate of going, to be a Judge?" asked Mr. Boffin, after surveying his small stature in silence.

The boy answered that he had not yet quite worked out that little calculation.

"I suppose there's nothing to prevent your going in for it?" said Mr. Boffin.

The boy virtually replied that as he had the honour to be a Briton who never never never, there was no-

thing to prevent his going in for it. Yet he seemed inclined to suspect that there might be something to prevent his coming out with it.

"Would a couple of pound help you up at all?" asked Mr. Boffin.

On this head, young Blight had no doubt whatever, so Mr. Boffin made him a present of that sum of money, and thanked him for his attention to his (Mr. Boffin's) affairs; which, he added, were now, he believed, as good as settled.

Then Mr. Boffin, with his stick at his ear, like a Familiar Spirit explaining the office to him, sat staring at a little bookcase of Law Practice and Law Reports, and at a window, and at an empty blue bag, and at a stick of sealing-wax, and a pen, and a box of wafers, and an apple, and a writing-pad — all very dusty — and at a number of inky smears and blots, and at an imperfectly-disguised gun-case pretending to be something legal, and at an iron box labelled HARMON ESTATE, until Mr. Lightwood appeared.

Mr. Lightwood explained that he came from the proctor's, with whom he had been engaged in transacting Mr. Boffin's affairs.

"And they seem to have taken a deal out of you!" said Mr. Boffin, with commiseration.

Mr. Lightwood, without explaining that his weariness was chronic, proceeded with his exposition that, all forms of law having been at length complied with, will of Harmon deceased having been proved, death of Harmon next inheriting having been proved, &c., and so forth, Court of Chancery having been moved, &c. and so forth, he, Mr. Lightwood, had now the great gratification, honor, and happiness, again &c. and so

forth, of congratulating Mr. Boffin on coming into possession, as residuary legatee, of upwards of one hundred thousand pounds, standing in the books of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England, again &c. and so forth.

"And what is particularly eligible in the property Mr. Boffin, is, that it involves no trouble. There are no estates to manage, no rents to return so much per cent. upon in bad times (which is an extremely dear way of getting your name into the newspapers), no voters to become parboiled in hot water with, no agents to take the cream off the milk before it comes to table. You could put the whole in a cash-box to-morrow morning, and take it with you to — say, to the Rocky Mountains. Inasmuch as every man," concluded Mr. Lightwood, with an indolent smile, "appears to be under a fatal spell which obliges him, sooner or later, to mention the Rocky Mountains in a tone of extreme familiarity to some other man, I hope you'll excuse my pressing you into the service of that gigantic range of geographical bores."

Without following this last remark very closely, Mr. Boffin cast his perplexed gaze first at the ceiling, and then at the carpet.

"Well," he remarked, "I don't know what to say about it, I am sure. I was a'most as well as I was. It's a great lot to take care of."

"My dear Mr. Boffin, then *don't* take care of it!"

"Eh?" said that gentleman.

"Speaking now," returned Mortimer, "with the irresponsible imbecility of a private individual, and not with the profundity of a professional adviser, I should say that if the circumstance of its being too

much, weighs upon your mind, you have the haven of consolation open to you that you can easily make it less. And if you should be apprehensive of the trouble of doing so, there is the further haven of consolation that any number of people will take the trouble off your hands."

"Well! I don't quite see it," retorted Mr. Boffin, still perplexed. "That's not satisfactory, you know, what you're a-saying."

"Is Anything satisfactory, Mr. Boffin?" asked Mortimer, raising his eyebrows.

"I used to find it so," answered Mr. Boffin, with a wistful look. "While I was foreman at the Bower — afore it *was* the Bower — I considered the business very satisfactory. The old man was a awful Tartar (saying it, I'm sure, without disrespect to his memory) but the business was a pleasant one to look after, from before daylight to past dark. It's a'most a pity," said Mr. Boffin, rubbing his ear, "that he ever went and made so much money. It would have been better for him if he hadn't so given himself up to it. You may depend upon it," making the discovery all of a sudden, "that *he* found it a great lot to take care of!"

Mr. Lightwood coughed, not convinced.

"And speaking of satisfactory," pursued Mr. Boffin, "why, Lord save us! when we come to take it to pieces, bit by bit, where's the satisfactoriness of the money as yet? When the old man does right the poor boy after all, the poor boy gets no good of it. He gets made away with, at the moment when he's lifting (as one may say) the cup and sarser to his lips. Mr. Lightwood, I will now name to you, that on behalf of the poor dear boy, me and Mrs. Boffin have stood out

against the old man times out of number, till he has called us every name he could lay his tongue to. I have seen him, after Mrs. Boffin has given him her mind respecting the claims of the nat'ral affections, catch off Mrs. Boffin's bonnet (she wore, in general, a black straw, perched as a matter of convenience on the top of her head), and send it spinning across the yard. I have indeed. And once, when he did this in a manner that amounted to personal, I should have given him a rattler for himself, if Mrs. Boffin hadn't thrown herself betwixt us, and received flush on the temple. Which dropped her, Mr. Lightwood. Dropped her."

Mr. Lightwood murmured "Equal honor — Mrs. Boffin's head and heart."

"You understand; I name this," pursued Mr. Boffin, "to show you, now the affairs are wound up, that me and Mrs. Boffin have ever stood, as we were in Christian honor bound, the children's friend. Me and Mrs. Boffin stood the poor girl's friend; me and Mrs. Boffin stood the poor boy's friend; me and Mrs. Boffin up and faced the old man when we momentarily expected to be turned out for our pains. As to Mrs. Boffin," said Mr. Boffin, lowering his voice, "she mightn't wish it mentioned now she's Fashionable, but she went so far as to tell him, in my presence, he was a flinty-hearted rascal."

Mr. Lightwood murmured "Vigorous Saxon spirit — Mrs. Boffin's ancestors — bowmen — Agincourt and Cressy."

"The last time me and Mrs. Boffin saw the poor boy," said Mr. Boffin, warming (as fat usually does) with a tendency to melt, "he was a child of seven

year old. For when he come back to make intercession for his sister, me and Mrs. Boffin were away overlooking a country contract which was to be sifted before carted, and he was come and gone in a single hour. I say he was a child of seven year old. He was going away, all alone and forlorn, to that foreign school, and he come into our place, situate up the yard of the present Bower, to have a warm at our fire. There was his little scanty travelling clothes upon him. There was his little scanty box outside in the shivering wind, which I was going to carry for him down to the steamboat, as the old man wouldn't hear of allowing a sixpence coach-money. Mrs. Boffin, then quite a young woman and a pictur of a full-blown rose, stands him by her, kneels down at the fire, warms her two open hands, and falls to rubbing his cheeks; but seeing the tears come into the child's eyes, the tears come fast into her own, and she holds him round the neck, like as if she was protecting him, and cries to me, 'I'd give the wide wide world, I would, to run away with him!' I don't say but what it cut me, and but what it at the same time heightened my feelings of admiration for Mrs. Boffin. The poor child clings to her for awhile, as she clings to him, and then, when the old man calls, he says 'I must go! God bless you!' and for a moment rests his heart against her bosom, and looks up at both of us, as if it was in pain — in agony. Such a look! I went aboard with him (I gave him first what little treat I thought he'd like), and I left him when he had fallen asleep in his berth, and I came back to Mrs. Boffin. But tell her what I would of how I had left him, it all went for nothing, for, according to her thoughts, he never changed that

look that he had looked up at us two. But it did one piece of good. Mrs. Boffin and me had no child of our own, and had sometimes wished that how we had one. But not now. 'We might both of us die,' says Mrs. Boffin, 'and other eyes might see that lonely look in our child.' So of a night, when it was very cold, or when the wind roared, or the rain dripped heavy, she would wake sobbing, and call out in a fluster, 'Don't you see the poor child's face? O shelter the poor child!' — till in course of years it gently wore out, as many things do."

"My dear Mr. Boffin, everything wears to rags," said Mortimer, with a light laugh.

"I won't go so far as to say everything," returned Mr. Boffin, on whom his manner seemed to grate, "because there's some things that I never found among the dust. Well, sir. So Mrs. Boffin and me grow older and older in the old man's service, living and working pretty hard in it, till the old man is discovered dead in his bed. Then Mrs. Boffin and me seal up his box, always standing on the table at the side of his bed, and having frequently heard tell of the Temple as a spot where lawyers' dust is contracted for, I come down here in search of a lawyer to advise, and I see your young man up at this present elevation, chopping at the flies on the window-sill with his penknife, and I give him a Hoy! not then having the pleasure of your acquaintance, and by that means come to gain the honor. Then you, and the gentleman in the uncomfortable neckcloth under the little archway in Saint Paul's Churchyard —"

"Doctors' Commons," observed Lightwood.

"I understood it was another name," said Mr. Boffin,

pausing, "but you know best. Then you and Doctor Scummons, you go to work, and you do the thing that's proper, and you and Doctor S. take steps for finding out the poor boy, and at last you do find out the poor boy, and me and Mrs. Boffin often exchange the observation, 'We shall see him again, under happy circumstances.' But it was never to be; and the want of satisfactoriness is, that after all the money never gets to him."

"But it gets," remarked Lightwood, with a languid inclination of the head, "into excellent hands."

"It gets into the hands of me and Mrs. Boffin only this very day and hour, and that's what I am working round to, having waited for this day and hour a' purpose. Mr. Lightwood, here has been a wicked cruel murder. By that murder me and Mrs. Boffin mysteriously profit. For the apprehension and conviction of the murderer, we offer a reward of one tithe of the property — a reward of Ten Thousand Pound."

"Mr. Boffin, it's too much."

"Mr. Lightwood, me and Mrs. Boffin have fixed the sum together, and we stand to it."

"But let me represent to you," returned Lightwood, "speaking now with professional profundity, and not with individual imbecility, that the offer of such an immense reward is a temptation to forced suspicion, forced construction of circumstances, strained accusation, a whole tool-box of edged tools."

"Well," said Mr. Boffin, a little staggered, "that's the sum we put o' one side for the purpose. Whether it shall be openly declared in the new notices that must now be put about in our names —"

"In your name, Mr. Boffin; in your name."

"Very well; in my name, which is the same as Mrs. Boffin's, and means both of us, is to be considered in drawing 'em up. But this is the first instruction that I, as the owner of the property, give to my lawyer on coming into it."

"Your lawyer, Mr. Boffin," returned Lightwood, making a very short note of it with a very rusty pen, "has the gratification of taking the instruction. There is another?"

"There is just one other, and no more. Make me as compact a little will as can be reconciled with tightness, leaving the whole of the property to 'my beloved wife, Henerietty Boffin, sole executrix.' Make it as short as you can, using those words; but make it tight."

At some loss to fathom Mr. Boffin's notions of a tight will, Lightwood felt his way.

"I beg your pardon, but professional profundity must be exact. When you say tight —"

"I mean tight," Mr. Boffin explained.

"Exactly so. And nothing can be more laudable. But is the tightness to bind Mrs. Boffin to any and what conditions?"

"Bind Mrs. Boffin?" interposed her husband. "No! What are you thinking of! What I want is, to make it all hers so tight as that her hold of it can't be loosed."

"Hers freely, to do what she likes with? Hers absolutely?"

"Absolutely?" repeated Mr. Boffin, with a short sturdy laugh. "Hah! I should think so! It would be handsome in me to begin to bind Mrs. Boffin at this time of day!"

So that instruction, too, was taken by Mr. Lightwood; and Mr. Lightwood, having taken it, was in the act of showing Mr. Boffin out, when Mr. Eugene Wrayburn almost jostled him in the doorway. Consequently Mr. Lightwood said, in his cool manner, "Let me make you two known to one another," and further signified that Mr. Wrayburn was counsel learned in the law, and that, partly in the way of business and partly in the way of pleasure, he had imparted to Mr. Wrayburn some of the interesting facts of Mr. Boffin's biography.

"Delighted," said Eugene — though he didn't look so — "to know Mr. Boffin."

"Thankee, sir, thankee," returned that gentleman. "And how do *you* like the law?"

"A — not particularly," returned Eugene.

"Too dry for you, eh? Well, I suppose it wants some years of sticking to, before you master it. But there's nothing like work. Look at the bees."

"I beg your pardon," returned Eugene, with a reluctant smile, "but will you excuse my mentioning that I always protest against being referred to the bees?"

"Do you!" said Mr. Boffin.

"I object on principle," said Eugene, "as a biped —"

"As a what?" asked Mr. Boffin.

"As a two-footed creature; — I object on principle, as a two-footed creature, to being constantly referred to insects and four-footed creatures. I object to being required to model my proceedings according to the proceedings of the bee, or the dog, or the spider, or the camel. I fully admit that the camel, for instance is an excessively temperate person; but he has several

stomachs to entertain himself with, and I have only one. Besides, I am not fitted up with a convenient cool cellar to keep my drink in."

"But I said, you know," urged Mr. Boffin, rather at a loss for an answer, "the bee."

"Exactly. And may I represent to you that it's injudicious to say the bee? For the whole case is assumed. Conceding for a moment that there is any analogy between a bee, and a man in a shirt and pantaloons (which I deny), and that it is settled that the man is to learn from the bee (which I also deny), the question still remains, what is he to learn? To imitate? Or to avoid? When your friends the bees worry themselves to that highly fluttered extent about their sovereign, and become perfectly distracted touching the slightest monarchical movement, are we men to learn the greatness of Tufthunting, or the littleness of the Court Circular? I am not clear, Mr. Boffin, but that the hive may be satirical."

"At all events, they work," said Mr. Boffin.

"Ye-es," returned Eugene, disparagingly, "they work; but don't you think they overdo it? They work so much more than they need — they make so much more than they can eat — they are so incessantly boring and buzzing at their one idea till Death comes upon them — that don't you think they overdo it? And are human labourers to have no holidays, because of the bees? And am I never to have change of air, because the bees don't? Mr. Boffin, I think honey excellent at breakfast; but, regarded in the light of my conventional schoolmaster and moralist, I protest against the tyrannical humbug of your friend the bee. With the highest respect for you."

"Thankee," said Mr. Boffin. "Morning, morning!"

But, the worthy Mr. Boffin jogged away with a comfortless impression he could have dispensed with, that there was a deal of unsatisfactoriness in the world, besides what he had recalled as appertaining to the Harmon property. And he was still jogging along Fleet Street in this condition of mind, when he became aware that he was closely tracked and observed by a man of genteel appearance.

"Now then?" said Mr. Boffin, stopping short, with his meditations brought to an abrupt check, "what's the next article?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Boffin."

"My name too, eh? How did you come by it? I don't know you."

"No, sir, you don't know me."

Mr. Boffin looked full at the man, and the man looked full at him. "No," said Mr. Boffin, after a glance at the pavement, as if it were made of faces and he were trying to match the man's, "I *don't* know you."

"I am nobody," said the stranger, "and not likely to be known; but Mr. Boffin's wealth —"

"Oh! that's got about already, has it?" muttered Mr. Boffin.

"— And his romantic manner of acquiring it, make him conspicuous. You were pointed out to me the other day."

"Well," said Mr. Boffin, "I should say I was a disappointment to you when I *was* pinte out, if your politeness would allow you to confess it, for I am well aware I am not much to look at. What might you want with me? Not in the law, are you?"

"No, sir."

"No information to give, for a reward?"

"No, sir."

There may have been a momentary mantling in the face of the man as he made the last answer, but it passed directly.

"If I don't mistake, you have followed me from my lawyer's and tried to fix my attention. Say out! Have you? Or haven't you?" demanded Mr. Boffin, rather angry.

"Yes."

"Why have you?"

"If you will allow me to walk beside you, Mr. Boffin, I will tell you. Would you object to turn aside into this place — I think it is called Clifford's Inn — where we can hear one another better than in the roaring street?"

("Now," thought Mr. Boffin, "if he proposes a game at skittles, or meets a country gentleman just come into property, or produces any article of jewellery he has found, I'll knock him down!") With this discreet reflection, and carrying his stick in his arms much as Punch carries his, Mr. Boffin turned into Clifford's Inn aforesaid.)

"Mr. Boffin, I happened to be in Chancery Lane this morning, when I saw you going along before me. I took the liberty of following you, trying to make up my mind to speak to you, till you went into your lawyer's. Then I waited outside till you came out."

"Don't quite sound like skittles, nor yet country gentleman, nor yet jewellery," thought Mr. Boffin, "but there's no knowing."

"I am afraid my object is a bold one, I am afraid

it has little of the usual practical world about it, but I venture it. If you ask me, or if you ask yourself — which is more likely — what emboldens me, I answer, I have been strongly assured, that you are a man of rectitude and plain dealing, with the soundest of sound hearts, and that you are blessed in a wife distinguished by the same qualities.”

“Your information is true of Mrs. Boffin, anyhow,” was Mr. Boffin’s answer, as he surveyed his new friend again. There was something repressed in the strange man’s manner, and he walked with his eyes on the ground — though conscious, for all that, of Mr. Boffin’s observation — and he spoke in a subdued voice. But his words came easily, and his voice was agreeable in tone, albeit constrained.

“When I add, I can discern for myself what the general tongue says of you — that you are quite unspoiled by Fortune, and not uplifted — I trust you will not, as a man of an open nature, suspect that I mean to flatter you, but will believe that all I mean is to excuse myself, these being my only excuses for my present intrusion.”

(“How much?” thought Mr. Boffin. “It must be coming to money. How much?”)

“You will probably change your manner of living, Mr. Boffin, in your changed circumstances. You will probably keep a larger house, have many matters to arrange, and be beset by numbers of correspondents. If you would try me as your Secretary —”

“As *what?*” cried Mr. Boffin, with his eyes wide open.

“Your Secretary.”

“Well,” said Mr. Boffin, under his breath, “that’s a queer thing!”

“Or,” pursued the stranger, wondering at Mr. Boffin’s wonder, “if you would try me as your man of business under any name, I know you would find me faithful and grateful, and I hope you would find me useful. You may naturally think that my immediate object is money. Not so, for I would willingly serve you a year — two years — any term you might appoint — before that should begin to be a consideration between us.”

“Where do you come from?” asked Mr. Boffin.

“I come,” returned the other, meeting his eye, “from many countries.”

Mr. Boffin’s acquaintance with the names and situations of foreign lands being limited in extent and somewhat confused in quality, he shaped his next question on an elastic model.

“From — any particular place?”

“I have been in many places.”

“What have you been?” asked Mr. Boffin.

Here again he made no great advance, for the reply was, “I have been a student and a traveller.”

“But if it ain’t a liberty to plump it out,” said Mr. Boffin, “what do you do for your living?”

“I have mentioned,” returned the other, with another look at him, and a smile, “what I aspire to do. I have been superseded as to some slight intentions I had, and I may say that I have now to begin life.”

Not very well knowing how to get rid of this applicant, and feeling the more embarrassed because his manner and appearance claimed a delicacy in which the worthy Mr. Boffin feared he himself might be de-

ficient, that gentleman glanced into the mouldy little plantation or cat-preserve, of Clifford's Inn, as it was that day, in search of a suggestion. Sparrows were there, cats were there, dry-rot and wet-rot were there, but it was not otherwise a suggestive spot.

"All this time," said the stranger, producing a little pocket-book and taking out a card, "I have not mentioned my name. My name is Rokesmith. I lodge at one Mr. Wilfer's, at Holloway."

Mr. Boffin stared again.

"Father of Miss Bella Wilfer?" said he.

"My landlord has a daughter named Bella. Yes; no doubt."

Now, this name had been more or less in Mr. Boffin's thoughts all the morning, and for days before; therefore he said:

"That's singular, too!" unconsciously staring again, past all bounds of good manners, with the card in his hand. "Though, by-the-bye, I suppose it was one of that family that pinte'd me out?"

"No. I have never been in the streets with one of them."

"Heard me talked of among 'em, though?"

"No. I occupy my own rooms, and have held scarcely any communication with them."

"Odder and odder!" said Mr. Boffin. "Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I don't know what to say to you."

"Say nothing," returned Mr. Rokesmith; "allow me to call on you in a few days. I am not so unconscionable as to think it likely that you would accept me on trust at first sight, and take me out of the very street. Let me come to you for your further opinion, at your leisure."

"That's fair, and I don't object," said Mr. Boffin; "but it must be on condition that it's fully understood that I no more know that I shall ever be in want of any gentleman as Secretary — it *was* Secretary you said; wasn't it?"

"Yes."

Again Mr. Boffin's eyes opened wide, and he stared at the applicant from head to foot, repeating "Queer! — You're sure it was Secretary? Are you?"

"I am sure I said so."

— "As Secretary," repeated Mr. Boffin, meditating upon the word; "I no more know that I may ever want a Secretary, or what not, than I do that I shall ever be in want of the man in the moon. Me and Mrs. Boffin have not even settled that we shall make any change in our way of life. Mrs. Boffin's inclinations certainly do tend towards Fashion; but, being already set up in a fashionable way at the Bower, she may not make further alterations. However, sir, as you don't press yourself, I wish to meet you so far as saying, by all means call at the Bower if you like. Call in the course of a week or two. At the same time, I consider that I ought to name, in addition to what I have already named, that I have in my employment a literary man — *with* a wooden leg — as I have no thoughts of parting from."

"I regret to hear I am in some sort anticipated," Mr. Rokesmith answered, evidently having heard it with surprise; "but perhaps other duties might arise?"

"You see," returned Mr. Boffin, with a confidential sense of dignity, "as to my literary man's duties, they're clear. Professionally he declines and he falls, and as a friend he drops into poetry."

Without observing that these duties seemed by no means clear to Mr. Rokesmith's astonished comprehension, Mr. Boffin went on:

"And now, sir, I'll wish you good-day. You can call at the Bower any time in a week or two. It's not above a mile or so from you, and your landlord can direct you to it. But as he may not know it by its new name of Boffin's Bower, say, when you inquire of him, its Harmon's; will you?"

"Harmoon's," repeated Mr. Rokesmith, seeming to have caught the sound imperfectly, "Harmarn's. How do you spell it?"

"Why, as to the spelling of it," returned Mr. Boffin, with great presence of mind, "that's *your* look out. Harmon's is all you've got to say to *him*. Morning, morning, morning!" And so departed, without looking back.

CHAPTER IX.

Mr. and Mrs. Boffin in Consultation.

BETAKING himself straight homeward, Mr. Boffin, without further let or hindrance, arrived at the Bower, and gave Mrs. Boffin (in a walking dress of black velvet and feathers, like a mourning coach-horse) an account of all he had said and done since breakfast.

"This brings us round, my dear," he then pursued, "to the question we left unfinished: namely, whether there's to be any new go-in for Fashion."

"Now, I'll tell you what I want, Noddy," said Mrs. Boffin, smoothing her dress with an air of immense enjoyment, "I wan't Society."

"Fashionable Society, my dear?"

"Yes!" cried Mrs. Boffin, laughing with the glee of a child. "Yes! It's no good my being kept here like Wax-Work; is it now?"

"People have to pay to see Wax-Work, my dear," returned her husband, "whereas (though you'd be cheap at the same money) the neighbours is welcome to see *you* for nothing."

"But it don't answer," said the cheerful Mrs. Boffin. "When we worked like the neighbours, we suited one another. Now we have left work off, we have left off suiting one another."

"What, do you think of beginning work again?" Mr. Boffin hinted.

"Out of the question! We have come into a great

fortune, and we must do what's right by our fortune, we must act up to it."

Mr. Boffin, who had a deep respect for his wife's intuitive wisdom, replied, though rather pensively: "I suppose we must."

"It's never been acted up to yet, and, consequently, no good has come of it," said Mrs. Boffin.

"True, to the present time," Mr. Boffin assented, with his former pensiveness, as he took his seat upon his settle. "I hope good may be coming of it in the future time. Towards which, what's your views, old lady?"

Mrs. Boffin, a smiling creature, broad of figure and simple of nature, with her hands folded in her lap, and with buxom creases in her throat, proceeded to expound her views.

"I say, a good house in a good neighbourhood, good things about us, good living, and good society. I say, live like our means, without extravagance, and be happy."

"Yes. I say be happy, too," assented the still pensive Mr. Boffin.

"Lor-a-mussy!" exclaimed Mrs. Boffin, laughing and clapping her hands, and gaily rocking herself to and fro, "when I think of me in a light yellow chariot and pair, with silver boxes to the wheels ——"

"Oh! you was thinking of that, was you, my dear?"

"Yes!" cried the delighted creature. "And with a footman up behind, with a bar across, to keep his legs from being poled! And with a coachman up in front, sinking down into a seat big enough for three of him, all covered with upholstery in green and white! And with two bay horses tossing their heads and stepping

higher than they trot long-ways! And with you and me leaning back inside, as grand as ninepence! Oh-h-h-h My! Ha ha ha ha ha!"

Mrs. Boffin clapped her hands again, rocked herself again, beat her feet upon the floor, and wiped the tears of laughter from her eyes.

"And what, my old lady," inquired Mr. Boffin, when he also had sympathetically laughed: "what's your views on the subject of the Bower?"

"Shut it up. Don't part with it, but put somebody in it, to keep it."

"Any other views?"

"Noddy," said Mrs. Boffin, coming from her fashionable sofa to his side on the plain settle, and hooking her comfortable arm through his, "Next I think — and I really have been thinking early and late — of the disappointed girl; her that was so cruelly disappointed, you know, both of her husband and his riches. Don't you think we might do something for her? Have her to live with us? Or something of that sort?"

"Ne-ver once thought of the way of doing it!" cried Mr. Boffin, smiting the table in his admiration. "What a thinking steam-ingen in this old lady is. And she don't know how she does it. Neither does the ingen!"

Mrs. Boffin pulled his nearest ear, in acknowledgment of this piece of philosophy, and then said, gradually toning down to a motherly strain: "Last, and not least, I have taken a fancy. You remember dear little John Harmon, before he went to school? Over yonder across the yard, at our fire? Now that he is past all benefit of the money, and it's come to us, I should like to find some orphan child, and take the boy and adopt him

and give him John's name, and provide for him. Somehow, it would make me easier, I fancy. Say it's only a whim ——"

"But I don't say so," interposed her husband.

"No, but deary, if you did ——"

"I should be a Beast if I did," her husband interposed again.

"That's as much as to say you agree? Good and kind of you, and like you, deary! And don't you begin to find it pleasant now," said Mrs. Boffin, once more radiant in her comely way from head to foot, and once more smoothing her dress with immense enjoyment, "don't you begin to find it pleasant already, to think that a child will be made brighter, and better, and happier, because of that poor sad child that day? And isn't it pleasant to know that the good will be done with the poor sad child's own money?"

"Yes; and it's pleasant to know that you are Mrs. Boffin," said her husband, "and it's been a pleasant thing to know this many and many a year!" It was ruin to Mrs. Boffin's aspirations, but, having so spoken, they sat side by side, a hopelessly Unfashionable pair.

These two ignorant and unpolished people had guided themselves so far on in their journey of life, by a religious sense of duty and desire to do right. Ten thousand weaknesses and absurdities might have been detected in the breasts of both; ten thousand vanities additional, possibly, in the breast of the woman. But the hard wrathful and sordid nature that had wrung as much work out of them as could be got in their best days, for as little money as could be paid to hurry on their worst, had never been so warped but that it knew their moral straightness and respected it.

In its own despite, in a constant conflict with itself and them, it had done so. And this is the eternal law. For, Evil often stops short at itself and dies with the doer of it; but Good, never.

Through his most inveterate purposes, the dead Jailer of Harmony Jail had known these two faithful servants to be honest and true. While he raged at them and reviled them for opposing him with the speech of the honest and true, it had scratched his stony heart, and he had perceived the powerlessness of all his wealth to buy them if he had addressed himself to the attempt. So, even while he was their griping taskmaster and never gave them a good word, he had written their names down in his will. So, even while it was his daily declaration that he mistrusted all mankind — and sorely indeed he did mistrust all who bore any resemblance to himself — he was as certain that these two people, surviving him, would be trustworthy in all things from the greatest to the least, as he was that he must surely die.

Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, sitting side by side, with Fashion withdrawn to an immeasurable distance, fell to discussing how they could best find their orphan. Mrs. Boffin suggested advertisement in the newspapers, requesting orphans answering annexed description to apply at the Bower on a certain day; but Mr. Boffin wisely apprehending obstruction of the neighbouring thoroughfares by orphan swarms, this course was negatived. Mrs. Boffin next suggested application to their clergyman for a likely orphan. Mr. Boffin thinking better of this scheme, they resolved to call upon the reverend gentleman at once, and to take the same opportunity of making acquaintance with Miss Bella

Wilfer. In order that these visits might be visits of state, Mrs. Boffin's equipage was ordered out.

This consisted of a long hammer-headed old horse, formerly used in the business, attached to a four-wheeled chaise of the same period, which had long been exclusively used by the Harmony Jail poultry as the favourite laying-place of several discreet hens. An unwonted application of corn to the horse, and of paint and varnish to the carriage, when both fell in as a part of the Boffin legacy, had made what Mr. Boffin considered a neat turn-out of the whole; and a driver being added, in the person of a long hammer-headed young man who was a very good match for the horse, left nothing to be desired. He, too, had been formerly used in the business, but was now entombed by an honest jobbing tailor of the district in a perfect Sepulchre of coat and gaiters, sealed with ponderous buttons.

Behind this domestic, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin took their seats in the back compartment of the vehicle: which was sufficiently commodious, but had an undignified and alarming tendency, in getting over a rough crossing, to hiccup itself away from the front compartment. On their being descried emerging from the gates of the Bower, the neighbourhood turned out at door and window to salute the Boffins. Among those who were ever and again left behind, staring after the equipage, were many youthful spirits, who hailed it in stentorian tones with such congratulations as "Nod-dy Bof-fin!" "Bof-fin's mon-ey!" "Down with the dust, Bof-fin!" and other similar compliments. These, the hammer-headed young man took in such ill part that he often impaired the majesty of the progress

by pulling up short, and making as though he would alight to exterminate the offenders; a purpose from which he only allowed himself to be dissuaded after long and lively arguments with his employers.

At length the Bower district was left behind, and the peaceful dwelling of the Reverend Frank Milvey was gained. The Reverend Frank Milvey's abode was a very modest abode, because his income was a very modest income. He was officially accessible to every blundering old woman who had incoherence to bestow upon him, and readily received the Boffins. He was quite a young man, expensively educated and wretchedly paid, with quite a young wife and half a dozen quite young children. He was under the necessity of teaching and translating from the classics, to eke out his scanty means, yet was generally expected to have more time to spare than the idlest person in the parish, and more money than the richest. He accepted the needless inequalities and inconsistencies of his life, with a kind of conventional submission that was almost slavish; and any daring layman who would have adjusted such burdens as his, more decently and graciously, would have had small help from him.

With a ready patient face and manner, and yet with a latent smile that showed a quick enough observation of Mrs. Boffin's dress, Mr. Milvey, in his little book-room — charged with sounds and cries as though the six children above were coming down through the ceiling, and the roasting leg of mutton below were coming up through the floor — listened to Mrs. Boffin's statement of her want of an orphan.

"I think," said Mr. Milvey, "that you have never had a child of your own, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin?"

Never.

"But, like the Kings and Queens in the Fairy Tales, I suppose you have wished for one?"

In a general way, yes.

Mr. Milvey smiled again, as he remarked to himself, "Those kings and queens were always wishing for children." It occurring to him, perhaps, that if they had been Curates, their wishes might have tended in the opposite direction.

"I think," he pursued, "we had better take Mrs. Milvey into our Council. She is indispensable to me. If you please, I'll call her."

So, Mr. Milvey called, "Margaretta, my dear!" and Mrs. Milvey came down. A pretty, bright little woman, something worn by anxiety, who had repressed many pretty tastes and bright fancies, and substituted in their stead, schools, soup, flannel, coals, and all the week-day cares and Sunday coughs of a large population, young and old. As gallantly had Mr. Milvey repressed much in himself that naturally belonged to his old studies and old fellow-students, and taken up among the poor and their children with the hard crumbs of life.

"Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, my dear, whose good fortune you have heard of."

Mrs. Milvey, with the most unaffected grace in the world, congratulated them, and was glad to see them. Yet her engaging face, being an open as well as a perceptive one, was not without her husband's latent smile.

"Mrs. Boffin wishes to adopt a little boy, my dear."

Mrs. Milvey, looking rather alarmed, her husband added:

"An orphan, my dear."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Milvey, reassured for her own little boys.

"And I was thinking, Margaretta, that perhaps old Mrs. Goody's grandchild might answer the purpose."

"Oh my dear Frank! I *don't* think that would do!"

"No?"

"Oh *no!*"

The smiling Mrs. Boffin, feeling it incumbent on her to take part in the conversation, and being charmed with the emphatic little wife and her ready interest, here offered her acknowledgments and inquired what there was against him?

"I *don't* think," said Mrs. Milvey, glancing at the Reverend Frank "— and I believe my husband will agree with me when he considers it again — that you could possibly keep that orphan clean from snuff. Because his grandmother takes so *many* ounces, and drops it over him."

"But he would not be living with his grandmother then, Margaretta," said Mr. Milvey.

"No, Frank, but it would be impossible to keep her from Mrs. Boffin's house; and the *more* there was to eat and drink there, the oftener she would go. And she *is* an inconvenient woman. I *hope* it's not uncharitable to remember that last Christmas Eve she drank eleven cups of tea, and grumbled all the time. And she is *not* a grateful woman, Frank. You recollect her addressing a crowd outside this house, about her wrongs, when, one night after we had gone to

bed, she brought back the petticoat of new flannel that had been given her, because it was too short."

"That's true," said Mr. Milvey. "I don't think that would do. Would little Harrison ——"

"Oh, *Frank!*" remonstrated his emphatic wife.

"He has no grandmother, my dear."

"No, but I *don't* think Mrs. Boffin would like an orphan who squints so *much*."

"That's true again," said Mr. Milvey, becoming haggard with perplexity. "If a little girl would do ——"

"But, my *dear* Frank, Mrs. Boffin wants a boy."

"That's true again," said Mr. Milvey. "Tom Bocker is a nice boy" (thoughtfully).

"But I *doubt*, Frank," Mrs. Milvey hinted, after a little hesitation, "if Mrs. Boffin wants an orphan *quite* nineteen, who drives a cart and waters the roads."

Mr. Milvey referred the point to Mrs. Boffin in a look; on that smiling lady's shaking her black velvet bonnet and bows, he remarked, in lower spirits, "that's true again."

"I am sure," said Mrs. Boffin, concerned at giving so much trouble, "that if I had known you would have taken so much pains, sir — and you too, ma'am — I don't think I would have come."

"*Pray* don't say that!" urged Mrs. Milvey.

"No, don't say that," assented Mr. Milvey, "because we are so much obliged to you for giving us the preference." Which Mrs. Milvey confirmed; and really the kind, conscientious couple spoke, as if they kept some profitable orphan warehouse and were personally patronized. "But it is a responsible trust," added Mr. Milvey, "and difficult to discharge. At the same time,

we are naturally very unwilling to lose the chance you so kindly give us, and if you could afford us a day or two to look about us, — you know, Margarett, we might carefully examine the workhouse, and the Infant School, and your District."

"To be *sure!*" said the emphatic little wife.

"We have orphans, I know," pursued Mr. Milvey, quite with the air as if he might have added, "in stock," and quite as anxiously as if there were great competition in the business and he were afraid of losing an order, "over at the clay-pits; but they are employed by relations or friends, and I am afraid it would come at last to a transaction in the way of barter. And even if you exchanged blankets for the child — or books and firing — it would be impossible to prevent their being turned into liquor."

Accordingly, it was resolved that Mr. and Mrs. Milvey should search for an orphan likely to suit, and as free as possible from the foregoing objections, and should communicate again with Mrs. Boffin. Then, Mr. Boffin took the liberty of mentioning to Mr. Milvey that if Mr. Milvey would do him the kindness to be perpetually his banker to the extent of "a twenty-pound note or so," to be expended without any reference to him, he would be heartily obliged. At this, both Mr. Milvey and Mrs. Milvey were quite as much pleased as if they had no wants of their own, but only knew what poverty was, in the persons of other people; and so the interview terminated with satisfaction and good opinion on all sides.

"Now, old lady," said Mr. Boffin, as they resumed their seats behind the hammer-headed horse and man:

"having made a very agreeable visit there, we'll try Wilfer's."

It appeared, on their drawing up at the family gate, that to try Wilfer's was a thing more easily projected than done, on account of the extreme difficulty of getting into that establishment; three pulls at the bell producing no external result, though each was attended by audible sounds of scampering and rushing within. At the fourth tug — vindictively administered by the hammer-headed young man — Miss Lavinia appeared, emerging from the house in an accidental manner, with a bonnet and parasol, as designing to take a contemplative walk. The young lady was astonished to find visitors at the gate, and expressed her feelings in appropriate action.

"Here's Mr. and Mrs. Boffin!" growled the hammer-headed young man through the bars of the gate, and at the same time shaking it, as if he were on view in a Menagerie; "they've been here half an hour."

"Who did you say?" asked Miss Lavinia.

"Mr. and Mrs. BOFFIN!" returned the young man, rising into a roar.

Miss Lavinia tripped up the steps to the house-door, tripped down the steps with the key, tripped across the little garden, and opened the gate. "Please to walk in," said Miss Lavinia, haughtily. "Our servant is out."

Mr. and Mrs. Boffin complying, and pausing in the little hall until Miss Lavinia came up to show them where to go next, perceived three pairs of listening legs upon the stairs above. Mrs. Wilfer's legs, Miss Bella's legs, Mr. George Sampson's legs.

"Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, I think?" said Lavinia, in a warning voice.

Strained attention on the part of Mrs. Wilfer's legs, of Miss Bella's legs, of Mr. George Sampson's legs.

"Yes, Miss."

"If you'll step this way — down these stairs — I'll let Ma know."

Excited flight of Mrs. Wilfer's legs, of Miss Bella's legs, of Mr. George Sampson's legs.

After waiting some quarter of an hour alone in the family sitting-room, which presented traces of having been so hastily arranged after a meal, that one might have doubted whether it was made tidy for visitors, or cleared for blindman's buff, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin became aware of the entrance of Mrs. Wilfer, majestically faint, and with a condescending stitch in her side: which was her company manner.

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Wilfer, after the first salutations, and as soon as she had adjusted the handkerchief under her chin, and waved her gloved hands, "to what am I indebted for this honour?"

"To make short of it, ma'am," returned Mr. Boffin, "perhaps you may be acquainted with the names of me and Mrs. Boffin, as having come into a certain property."

"I have heard, sir," returned Mrs. Wilfer, with a dignified bend of her head, "of such being the case."

"And I dare say, ma'am," pursued Mr. Boffin, while Mrs. Boffin added confirmatory nods and smiles, "you are not very much inclined to take kindly to us?"

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Wilfer. "'Twere unjust to visit upon Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, a calamity which was

doubtless a dispensation." These words were rendered the more effective by a serenely heroic expression of suffering.

"That's fairly meant, I am sure," remarked the honest Mr. Boffin; "Mrs. Boffin and me, ma'am, are plain people, and we don't want to pretend to anything, nor yet to go round and round at anything: because there's always a straight way to everything. Consequently, we make this call to say, that we shall be glad to have the honor and pleasure of your daughter's acquaintance, and that we shall be rejiced if your daughter will come to consider our house in the light of her home equally with this. In short, we want to cheer your daughter, and to give her the opportunity of sharing such pleasures as we are a going to take ourselves. We want to brisk her up, and brisk her about, and give her a change."

"That's it!" said the open-hearted Mrs. Boffin. "Lor! Let's be comfortable."

Mrs. Wilfer bent her head in a distant manner to her lady visitor, and with majestic monotony replied to the gentleman:

"Pardon me. I have several daughters. Which of my daughters am I to understand is thus favoured by the kind intentions of Mr. Boffin and his lady?"

"Don't you see?" the ever-smiling Mrs. Boffin put in. "Naturally, Miss Bella, you know."

"Oh-h!" said Mrs. Wilfer, with a severely unconvinced look. "My daughter Bella is accessible and shall speak for herself." Then opening the door a little way, simultaneously with a sound of scuttling outside it, the good lady made the proclamation, "Send Miss Bella to me!" Which proclamation, though grandly

formal, and one might almost say heraldic, to hear, was in fact enunciated with her maternal eyes reproachfully glaring on that young lady in the flesh — and in so much of it that she was retiring with difficulty into the small closet under the stairs, apprehensive of the emergence of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin.

"The avocations of R. W., my husband," Mrs. Wilfer explained, on resuming her seat, "keep him fully engaged in the City at this time of the day, or he would have had the honor of participating in your reception beneath our humble roof."

"Very pleasant premises!" said Mr. Boffin, cheerfully.

"Pardon me, sir," returned Mrs. Wilfer, correcting him, "it is the abode of conscious though independent Poverty."

Finding it rather difficult to pursue the conversation down this road, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin sat staring at mid-air, and Mrs. Wilfer sat silently giving them to understand that every breath she drew required to be drawn with a self-denial rarely paralleled in history, until Miss Bella appeared: whom Mrs. Wilfer presented, and to whom she explained the purpose of the visitors.

"I am much obliged to you, I am sure," said Miss Bella, coldly shaking her curls, "but I doubt if I have the inclination to go out at all."

"Bella!" Mrs. Wilfer admonished her; "Bella, you must conquer this."

"Yes, do what your Ma says, and conquer it, my dear," urged Mrs. Boffin, "because we shall be so glad to have you, and because you are much too pretty to keep yourself shut up." With that, the pleasant creature gave her a kiss, and patted her on her dimpled

shoulders; Mrs. Wilfer sitting stiffly by, like a functionary presiding over an interview previous to an execution.

"We are going to move into a nice house," said Mrs. Boffin, who was woman enough to compromise Mr. Boffin on that point, when he couldn't very well contest it; "and we are going to set up a nice carriage, and we'll go everywhere and see everything. And you mustn't," seating Bella beside her, and patting her hand, "you mustn't feel a dislike to us to begin with, because we couldn't help it, you know, my dear."

With the natural tendency of youth to yield to candour and sweet temper, Miss Bella was so touched by the simplicity of this address that she frankly returned Mrs. Boffin's kiss. Not at all to the satisfaction of that good woman of the world, her mother, who sought to hold the advantageous ground of obliging the Boffins instead of being obliged.

"My youngest daughter, Lavinia," said Mrs. Wilfer, glad to make a diversion, as that young lady reappeared. "Mr. George Sampson, a friend of the family."

The friend of the family was in that stage of the tender passion which bound him to regard everybody else as the foe of the family. He put the round head of his cane in his mouth, like a stopper, when he sat down. As if he felt himself full to the throat with affronting sentiments. And he eyed the Boffins with implacable eyes.

"If you like to bring your sister with you when you come to stay with us," said Mrs. Boffin, "of course we shall be glad. The better you please yourself Miss Bella, the better you'll please us."

"Oh, my consent is of no consequence at all, I suppose?" cried Miss Lavinia.

"Lavvy," said her sister, in a low voice, "have the goodness to be seen and not heard."

"No, I won't," replied the sharp Lavinia. "I'm not a child, to be taken notice of by strangers."

"You *are* a child."

"I'm not a child, and I won't be taken notice of. 'Bring your sister,' indeed!"

"Lavinia!" said Mrs. Wilfer. "Hold! I will not allow you to utter in my presence the absurd suspicion that any strangers — I care not what their names — can patronize my child. Do you dare to suppose, you ridiculous girl, that Mr. and Mrs. Boffin would enter these doors upon a patronizing errand; or, if they did, would remain within them, only for one single instant, while your mother had the strength yet remaining in her vital frame to request them to depart? You little know your mother if you presume to think so."

"It's all very fine," Lavinia began to grumble, when Mrs. Wilfer repeated:

"Hold! I will not allow this. Do you not know what is due to guests? Do you not comprehend that in presuming to hint that this lady and gentleman could have any idea of patronizing any member of your family — I care not which — you accuse them of an impertinence little less than insane?"

"Never mind me and Mrs. Boffin, ma'am," said Mr. Boffin, smilingly: "we don't care."

"Pardon me, but *I* do," returned Mrs. Wilfer.

Miss Lavinia laughed a short laugh as she muttered, "Yes, to be sure."

"And I require my audacious child," proceeded

Mrs. Wilfer, with a withering look at her youngest, on whom it had not the slightest effect, "to please to be just to her sister Bella; to remember that her sister Bella is much sought after; and that when her sister Bella accepts an attention, she considers herself to be conferring qui-i-ite as much honour," — this with an indignant shiver, — "as she receives."

But, here Miss Bella repudiated, and said quietly, "I can speak for myself, you know, ma. You needn't bring *me* in, please."

"And it's all very well aiming at others through convenient me," said the irrepressible Lavinia, spitefully; "but I should like to ask George Sampson what *he* says to it."

"Mr. Sampson," proclaimed Mrs. Wilfer, seeing that young gentleman take his stopper out, and so darkly fixing him with her eyes as that he put it in again: "Mr. Sampson, as a friend of this family and a frequenter of this house, is, I am persuaded, far too well-bred to interpose on such an invitation."

This exaltation of the young gentleman moved the conscientious Mrs. Boffin to repentance for having done him an injustice in her mind, and consequently to saying that she and Mr. Boffin would at any time be glad to see him; an attention which he handsomely acknowledged by replying, with his stopper unremoved, "Much obliged to you, but I'm always engaged, day and night."

However, Bella compensating for all drawbacks by responding to the advances of the Boffins in an engaging way, that easy pair were on the whole well satisfied, and proposed to the said Bella that as soon as they should be in a condition to receive her in a

manner suitable to their desires, Mrs. Boffin should return with notice of the fact. This arrangement Mrs. Wilfer sanctioned with a stately inclination of her head and wave of her gloves, as who should say, "Your demerits shall be overlooked, and you shall be mercifully gratified, poor people."

"By-the-bye, ma'am," said Mr. Boffin, turning back as he was going, "you have a lodger?"

"A gentleman," Mrs. Wilfer answered, qualifying the low expression, "undoubtedly occupies our first floor."

"I may call him Our Mutual Friend," said Mr. Boffin. "What sort of a fellow *is* Our Mutual Friend, now? Do you like him?"

"Mr. Rokesmith is very punctual, very quiet, a very eligible inmate."

"Because," Mr. Boffin explained, "you must know that I'm not particularly well acquainted with Our Mutual Friend, for I have only seen him once. You give a good account of him. Is he at home?"

"Mr. Rokesmith is at home," said Mrs. Wilfer; "indeed," pointing through the window, "there he stands at the garden gate. Waiting for you, perhaps?"

"Perhaps so," replied Mr. Boffin. "Saw me come in, maybe."

Bella had closely attended to this short dialogue. Accompanying Mrs. Boffin to the gate, she as closely watched what followed.

"How are you, sir, how are you?" said Mr. Boffin. "This is Mrs. Boffin. Mr. Rokesmith, that I told you of, my dear."

She gave him good day, and he bestirred himself

and helped her to her seat, and the like, with a ready hand.

"Good-bye for the present, Miss Bella," said Mrs. Boffin, calling out a hearty parting. "We shall meet again soon! And then I hope I shall have my little John Harmon to show you."

Mr. Rokesmith, who was at the wheel adjusting the skirts of her dress, suddenly looked behind him, and around him, and then looked up at her, with a face so pale that Mrs. Boffin cried:

"Gracious!" And after a moment, "What's the matter, sir?"

"How can you show her the Dead?" returned Mr. Rokesmith.

"It's only an adopted child. One I have told her of. One I'm going to give the name to!"

"You took me by surprise," said Mr. Rokesmith, "and it sounded like an omen, that you should speak of showing the Dead to one so young and blooming."

Now, Bella suspected by this time that Mr. Rokesmith admired her. Whether the knowledge (for it was rather that than suspicion) caused her to incline to him a little more, or a little less, than she had done at first; whether it rendered her eager to find out more about him, because she sought to establish reason for her distrust, or because she sought to free him from it; was as yet dark to her own heart. But at most times he occupied a great amount of her attention, and she had set her attention closely on this incident.

That he knew it as well as she, she knew as well as he, when they were left together standing on the path by the garden gate.

"Those are worthy people, Miss Wilfer."

"Do you know them well?" asked Bella.

He smiled, reproaching her, and she coloured, reproaching herself — both, with the knowledge that she had meant to entrap him into an answer not true — when he said "I know *of* them."

"Truly, he told us he had seen you but once."

"Truly, I supposed he did."

Bella was nervous now, and would have been glad to recall her question.

"You thought it strange that, feeling much interested in you, I should start at what sounded like a proposal to bring you into contact with the murdered man who lies in his grave. I might have known — of course in a moment should have known — that it could not have that meaning. But my interest remains."

Re-entering the family-room in a meditative state, Miss Bella was received by the irrepressible Lavinia with:

"There, Bella! At last I hope you have got your wishes realized — by your Boffins. You'll be rich enough now — with your Boffins. You can have as much flirting as you like — at your Boffins. But you won't take *me* to your Boffins, I can tell you — you and your Boffins too!"

"If," quoth Mr. George Sampson, moodily pulling his stopper out, "Miss Bella's Mr. Boffin comes any more of his nonsense to *me*, I only wish him to understand, as betwixt man and man, that he does it at his per — —" and was going to say peril; but Miss Lavinia, having no confidence in his mental powers, and feeling his oration to have no definite application

to any circumstances, jerked his stopper in again, with a sharpness that made his eyes water.

And now the worthy Mrs. Wilfer, having used her youngest daughter as a lay-figure for the edification of these Boffins, became bland to her, and proceeded to develop her last instance of force of character, which was still in reserve. This was, to illuminate the family with her remarkable powers as a physiognomist; powers that terrified R. W. whenever let loose, as being always fraught with gloom and evil which no inferior prescience was aware of. And this Mrs. Wilfer now did, be it observed, in jealousy of these Boffins, in the very same moments when she was already reflecting how she would flourish these very same Boffins and the state they kept, over the heads of her Boffinless friends.

"Of their manners," said Mrs. Wilfer, "I say nothing. Of their appearance, I say nothing. Of the disinterestedness of their intentions towards Bella, I say nothing. But the craft, the secrecy, the dark deep underhanded plotting, written in Mrs. Boffin's countenance, make me shudder."

As an incontrovertible proof that those baleful attributes were all there, Mrs. Wilfer shuddered on the spot.

CHAPTER X.

A Marriage Contract.

THERE is excitement in the Veneering mansion. The mature young lady is going to be married (powder and all) to the mature young gentleman, and she is to be married from the Veneering house, and the Veneerings are to give the breakfast. The Analytical, who objects as a matter of principle to everything that occurs on the premises, necessarily objects to the match; but his consent has been dispensed with, and a spring-van is delivering its load of greenhouse plants at the door, in order that to-morrow's feast may be crowned with flowers.

The mature young lady is a lady of property. The mature young gentleman is a gentleman of property. He invests his property. He goes, in a condescending amateurish way, into the City, attends meetings of Directors, and has to do with traffic in Shares. As is well known to the wise in their generation, traffic in Shares is the one thing to have to do with in this world. Have no antecedents, no established character, no cultivation, no ideas, no manners; have Shares. Have Shares enough to be on Boards of Direction in capital letters, oscillate on mysterious business between London and Paris, and be great. Where does he

come from? Shares. Where is he going to? Shares. What are his tastes? Shares. Has he any principles? Shares. What squeezes him into Parliament? Shares. Perhaps he never of himself achieved success in anything, never originated anything, never produced anything? Sufficient answer to all; Shares. O mighty Shares! To set those blaring images so high, and to cause us smaller vermin, as under the influence of henbane or opium, to cry out, night and day, "Relieve us of our money, scatter it for us, buy us and sell us, ruin us, only we beseech ye take rank among the powers of the earth, and fatten on us"!

While the Loves and Graces have been preparing this torch for Hymen, which is to be kindled tomorrow, Mr. Twemlow has suffered much in his mind. It would seem that both the mature young lady and the mature young gentleman must indubitably be Veneering's oldest friends. Wards of his, perhaps? Yet that can scarcely be, for they are older than himself. Veneering has been in their confidence throughout, and has done much to lure them to the altar. He has mentioned to Twemlow how he said to Mrs. Veneering, "Anastatia, this must be a match." He has mentioned to Twemlow how he regards Sophronia Akershem (the mature young lady) in the light of a sister, and Alfred Lammle (the mature young gentleman) in the light of a brother. Twemlow has asked him whether he went to school as a junior with Alfred? He has answered, "Not exactly." Whether Sophronia was adopted by his mother? He has answered, "Not precisely so." Twemlow's hand has gone to his forehead with a lost air.

But, two or three weeks ago, Twemlow, sitting over his newspaper, and over his dry-toast and weak tea, and over the stable-yard in Duke Street, St. James's, received a highly-perfumed cocked-hat and monogram from Mrs. Veneering, entreating her dearest Mr. T., if not particularly engaged that day, to come like a charming soul and make a fourth at dinner with dear Mr. Podsnap, for the discussion of an interesting family topic; the last three words doubly underlined and pointed with a note of admiration. And Twemlow, replying, "Not engaged, and more than delighted," goes, and this takes place:

"My dear Twemlow," says Veneering, "your ready response to Anastatia's unceremonious invitation is truly kind, and like an old, old friend. You know our dear friend Podsnap?"

Twemlow ought to know the dear friend Podsnap who covered him with so much confusion, and he says he does know him, and Podsnap reciprocates. Apparently, Podsnap has been so wrought upon in a short time, as to believe that he has been intimate in the house many, many, many years. In the friendliest manner he is making himself quite at home with his back to the fire, executing a statuette of the Colossus at Rhodes. Twemlow has before noticed in his feeble way how soon the Veneering guests become infected with the Veneering fiction. Not, however, that he has the least notion of its being his own case.

"Our friends, Alfred and Sophronia," pursues Veneering the veiled prophet: "our friends Alfred and Sophronia, you will be glad to hear, my dear fellows,

are going to be married. As my wife and I make it a family affair the entire direction of which we take upon ourselves, of course our first step is to communicate the fact to our family friends.

("Oh!" thinks Twemlow, with his eyes on Podsnap, "then there are only two of us, and he's the other.")

"I did hope," Veneering goes on, "to have had Lady Tippins to meet you; but she is always in request, and is unfortunately engaged."

("Oh!" thinks Twemlow, with his eyes wandering, "then there are three of us, and *she's* the other.")

"Mortimer Lightwood," resumes Veneering, "whom you both know, is out of town; but he writes, in his whimsical manner, that as we ask him to be bridegroom's best man when the ceremony takes place, he will not refuse, though he doesn't see what he has to do with it."

("Oh!" thinks Twemlow, with his eyes rolling, "then there are four of us, and *he's* the other.")

"Boots and Brewer," observes Veneering, "whom you also know, I have not asked to-day; but I reserve them for the occasion."

("Then," thinks Twemlow, with his eyes shut, "there are si——" But here collapses and does not completely recover until dinner is over and the Analytical has been requested to withdraw.)

"We now come," says Veneering, "to the point, the real point, of our little family consultation. Sophronia, having lost both father and mother, has no one to give her away."

"Give her away yourself," says Podsnap.

"My dear Podsnap, no. For three reasons. Firstly, because I couldn't take so much upon myself when I have respected family friends to remember. Secondly, because I am not so vain as to think that I look the part. Thirdly, because Anastatia is a little superstitious on the subject and feels averse to my giving away anybody until baby is old enough to be married."

"What would happen if he did?" Podsnap inquires of Mrs. Veneering.

"My dear Mr. Podsnap, it's very foolish I know, but I have an instinctive presentiment that if Hamilton gave away anybody else first, he would never give away baby." Thus Mrs. Veneering; with her open hands pressed together, and each of her eight aquiline fingers looking so very like her one aquiline nose that the bran-new jewels on them seem necessary for distinction's sake.

"But, my dear Podsnap," quoth Veneering, "there *is* a tried friend of our family who, I think and hope you will agree with me, Podsnap, is the friend on whom this agreeable duty almost naturally devolves. That friend," saying the words as if the company were about a hundred and fifty in number, "is now among us. That friend is Twemlow."

"Certainly!" From Podsnap.

"That friend," Veneering repeats with greater firmness, "is our dear good Twemlow. And I cannot sufficiently express to you, my dear Podsnap, the pleasure I feel in having this opinion of mine and

Anastasia's so readily confirmed by you, that other equally familiar and tried friend who stands in the proud position — I mean who proudly stands in the position — or I ought rather to say, who places Anastasia and myself in the proud position of himself standing in the simple position — of baby's godfather." And, indeed, Veneering is much relieved in mind to find that Podsnap betrays no jealousy of Twemlow's elevation.

So, it has come to pass that the spring-van is strewn with flowers on the rosy hours and on the staircase, and that Twemlow is surveying the ground on which he is to play his distinguished part to-morrow. He has already been to the church, and taken note of the various impediments in the aisle, under the auspices of an extremely dreary widow who opens the pews, and whose left hand appears to be in a state of acute rheumatism, but is in fact voluntarily doubled up to act as a money-box.

And now Veneering shoots out of the Study wherein he is accustomed, when contemplative, to give his mind to the carving and gilding of the Pilgrims going to Canterbury, in order to show Twemlow the little flourish he has prepared for the trumpets of fashion, describing how that on the seventeenth instant, at St. James's Church, the Reverend Blank Blank, assisted by the Reverend Dash Dash, united in the bonds of matrimony, Alfred Lammle Esquire, of Sackville Street, Piccadilly, to Sophronia, only daughter of the late Horatio Akershem, Esquire, of Yorkshire. Also how the fair bride was married from the house of Hamilton Veneering, Esquire, of Stucconia, and was given away

by Melvin Twemlow, Esquire, of Duke Street, St. James's, second cousin to Lord Snigsworth, of Snigsworthy Park. While perusing which composition, Twemlow makes some opaque approach to perceiving that if the Reverend Blank Blank and the Reverend Dash Dash fail, after this introduction, to become enrolled in the list of Veneering's dearest and oldest friends, they will have none but themselves to thank for it.

After which, appears Sophronia (whom Twemlow has seen twice in his lifetime), to thank Twemlow for counterfeiting the late Horatio Akershem Esquire, broadly of Yorkshire. And after her, appears Alfred (whom Twemlow has seen once in his lifetime), to do the same and to make a pasty sort of glitter, as if he were constructed for candle-light only, and had been let out into daylight by some grand mistake. And after that, comes Mrs. Veneering, in a pervadingly aquiline state of figure, and with transparent little knobs on her temper, like the little transparent knob on the bridge of her nose, "Worn out by worry and excitement," as she tells her dear Mr. Twemlow, and reluctantly revived with curaçoa by the Analytical. And after that, the bridesmaids begin to come by railroad from various parts of the country, and to come like adorable recruits enlisted by a sergeant not present; for, on arriving at the Veneering depôt, they are in a barrack of strangers.

So, Twemlow goes home to Duke Street, St. James's, to take a plate of mutton broth with a chop in it, and a look at the marriage-service, in order that he may cut in at the right place to-morrow; and he is low, and

feels it dull over the livery stable-yard, and is distinctly aware of a dint in his heart, made by the most adorable of the adorable bridesmaids. For, the poor little harmless gentleman once had his fancy, like the rest of us, and she didn't answer (as she often does not), and he thinks the adorable bridesmaid is like the fancy as she was then (which she is not at all), and that if the fancy had not married some one else for money, but had married him for love, he and she would have been happy (which they wouldn't have been), and that she has a tenderness for him still (whereas her toughness is a proverb). Brooding over the fire, with his dried little head in his dried little hands, and his dried little elbows on his dried little knees, Twemlow is melancholy. "No Adorable to bear me company here!" thinks he. "No Adorable at the club! A waste, a waste, a waste, my Twemlow!" And so drops asleep, and has galvanic starts all over him.

Betimes next morning, that horrible old Lady Tippins (relict of the late Sir Thomas Tippins, knighted in mistake for somebody else by His Majesty King George the Third, who, while performing the ceremony, was graciously pleased to observe, "What, what, what? Who, who, who? Why, why, why?") begins to be dyed and varnished for the interesting occasion. She has a reputation for giving smart accounts of things, and she must be at these people's early, my dear, to lose nothing of the fun. Whereabout in the bonnet and drapery announced by her name, any fragment of the real woman may be concealed, is perhaps known to her maid; but you could easily buy all you see of her, in Bond Street; or you might scalp her, and peel

her, and scrape her, and make two Lady Tippinses out of her, and yet not penetrate to the genuine article. She has a large gold eye-glass, has Lady Tippins, to survey the proceedings with. If she had one in each eye, it might keep that other drooping lid up, and look more uniform. But perennial youth is in her artificial flowers, and her list of lovers is full.

"Mortimer, you wretch," says Lady Tippins, turning the eye-glass about and about, "where is your charge, the bridegroom?"

"Give you my honor," returns Mortimer, "I don't know, and I don't care."

"Miserable! Is that the way you do your duty?"

"Beyond an impression that he is to sit upon my knee and be seconded at some point of the solemnities, like a principal at a prize-fight, I assure you I have no notion what my duty is," returns Mortimer.

Eugene is also in attendance, with a pervading air upon him of having presupposed the ceremony to be a funeral, and of being disappointed. The scene is the Vestry-room of St. James's Church, with a number of leathery old registers on shelves, that might be bound in Lady Tippinses.

But, hark! A carriage at the gate, and Mortimer's man arrives, looking rather like a spurious Mephistopheles and an unacknowledged member of that gentleman's family. Whom Lady Tippins, surveying through her eye-glass, considers a fine man, and quite a catch; and of whom Mortimer remarks, in the lowest spirits, as he approaches, "I believe this is my fellow, confound him!" More carriages at the gate, and lo the rest of the characters. Whom Lady Tippins, standing

on a cushion, surveying through the eye-glass, thus checks off: "Bride; five-and-forty if a day, thirty shillings a yard, veil fifteen pound, pocket-handkerchief a present. Bridesmaids; kept down for fear of outshining bride, consequently not girls, twelve and sixpence a yard, Veneering's flowers, snubnosed one rather pretty but too conscious of her stockings, bonnets three pound ten. Twemlow; blessed release for the dear man if she really was his daughter, nervous even under the pretence that she is, well he may be. Mrs. Veneering; never saw such velvet, say two thousand pounds as she stands, absolute jeweller's window, father must have been a pawnbroker, or how could these people do it? Attendant unknowns; pokey."

Ceremony performed, register signed, Lady Tippins escorted out of sacred edifice by Veneering, carriages rolling back to Stucconia, servants with favours and flowers, Veneering's house reached, drawing-rooms most magnificent. Here, the Podsnaps await the happy party; Mr. Podsnap, with his hair-brushes made the most of; that imperial rocking-horse, Mrs. Podsnap, majestically skittish. Here, too, are Boots and Brewer, and the two other Buffers; each Buffer with a flower in his button-hole, his hair curled, and his gloves buttoned on tight, apparently come prepared, if anything had happened to the bridegroom, to be married instantly. Here, too, the bride's aunt and next relation; a widowed female of a Medusa sort, in a stoney cap, glaring petrification at her fellow-creatures. Here, too, the bride's trustee; an oilcake-fed style of business-gentleman with mooney spectacles, and an object of much interest. Veneering launching himself upon this trustee as his oldest friend (which makes seven, Twem-

low thought), and confidentially retiring with him into the conservatory, it is understood that Veneering is his co-trustee, and that they are arranging about the fortune. Buffers are even overheard to whisper Thirty Thousand Pounds! with a smack and a relish suggestive of the very finest oysters. Pokey unknowns, amazed to find how intimately they know Veneering, pluck up spirit, fold their arms, and begin to contradict him before breakfast. What time Mrs. Veneering, carrying baby dressed as a bridesmaid, flits about among the company, emitting flashes of many-coloured lightning from diamonds, emeralds, and rubies.

The Analytical, in course of time achieving what he feels to be due to himself in bringing to a dignified conclusion several quarrels he has on hand with the pastrycook's men, announces breakfast. Dining-room no less magnificent than drawing-room; tables superb; all the camels out, and all laden. Splendid cake, covered with Cupids, silver, and true lovers' knots. Splendid bracelet, produced by Veneering before going down, and clasped upon the arm of bride. Yet nobody seems to think much more of the Veneerings than if they were a tolerable landlord and landlady doing the thing in the way of business at so much a head. The bride and bride-groom talk and laugh apart, as has always been their manner; and the Buffers work their way through the dishes with systematic perseverance, as has always been *their* manner; and the pokey unknowns are exceedingly benevolent to one another in invitations to take glasses of champagne; but Mrs. Podsnap, arching her mane and rocking her grandest, has a far more deferential audience than Mrs. Veneering; and Podsnap all but does the honours.

Another dismal circumstance is, that Veneering, having the captivating Tippins on one side of him and the bride's aunt on the other, finds it immensely difficult to keep the peace. For, Medusa, besides unmistakably glaring petrification at the fascinating Tippins, follows every lively remark made by that dear creature, with an audible snort: which may be referable to a chronic cold in the head, but may also be referable to indignation and contempt. And this snort being regular in its reproduction, at length comes to be expected by the company, who make embarrassing pauses when it is falling due, and by waiting for it, render it more emphatic when it comes. The stoney aunt has likewise an injurious way of rejecting all dishes whereof Lady Tippins partakes: saying aloud when they are proffered to her, "No, no, no, not for me. Take it away!" As with a set purpose of implying a misgiving that if nourished upon similar meats, she might come to be like that charmer, which would be a fatal consummation. Aware of her enemy, Lady Tippins tries a youthful sally or two, and tries the eye-glass; but, from the impenetrable cap and snorting armour of the stoney aunt all weapons rebound powerless.

Another objectionable circumstance is, that the pokey unknowns support each other in being unimpressible. They persist in not being frightened by the gold and silver camels, and they are banded together to defy the elaborately chased ice-pails. They even seem to unite in some vague utterance of the sentiment that the landlord and landlady will make a pretty good profit out of this, and they almost carry themselves like customers. Nor is there compensating

influence in the adorable bridesmaids; for, having very little interest in the bride, and none at all in one another, those lovely beings become, each one on her own account, depreciatingly contemplative of the millinery present; while the bridegroom's man, exhausted, in the back of his chair, appears to be improving the occasion by penitentially contemplating all the wrong he has ever done; the difference between him and his friend Eugene, being, that the latter, in the back of *his* chair, appears to be contemplating all the wrong he would like to do — particularly to the present company.

In which state of affairs, the usual ceremonies rather droop and flag, and the splendid cake when cut by the fair hand of the bride has but an indigestible appearance. However, all the things indispensable to be said are said, and all the things indispensable to be done are done (including Lady Tippins's yawning, falling asleep, and waking insensible), and there is hurried preparation for the nuptial journey to the Isle of Wight, and the outer air teems with brass bands and spectators. In full sight of whom, the malignant star of the Analytical has pre-ordained that pain and ridicule shall befall him. For he, standing on the doorsteps to grace the departure, is suddenly caught a most prodigious thump on the side of his head with a heavy shoe, which a Buffer in the hall, champagne-flushed and wild of aim, has borrowed on the spur of the moment from the pastry-cook's porter, to cast after the departing pair as an auspicious omen.

So they all go up again into the gorgeous drawing-rooms — all of them flushed with breakfast, as having

taken scarlatina sociably — and there the combined unknowns do malignant things with their legs to ottomans, and take as much as possible out of the splendid furniture. And so, Lady Tippins, quite undetermined whether to-day is the day before yesterday, or the day after to-morrow, or the week after next, fades away; and Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene fade away, and Twemlow fades away, and the stoney aunt goes away — she declines to fade, proving rock to the last — and even the unknowns are slowly strained off, and it is all over.

All over, that is to say, for the time being. But, there is another time to come, and it comes in about a fortnight, and it comes to Mr. and Mrs. Lammle on the sands at Shanklin, in the Isle of Wight.

Mr. and Mrs. Lammle have walked for some time on the Shanklin sands, and one may see by their foot-prints that they have not walked arm in arm, and that they have not walked in a straight track, and that they have walked in a moody humour; for, the lady has prodded little spiriting holes in the damp sand before her with her parasol, and the gentleman has trailed his stick after him. As if he were of the Mephistopheles family indeed, and had walked with a drooping tail.

“Do you mean to tell me, then, Sophronia —”

Thus he begins after a long silence, when Sophronia flashes fiercely, and turns upon him.

“Don’t put it upon *me*, sir. I ask you, do *you* mean to tell me?”

Mr. Lammle falls silent again, and they walk as before. Mrs. Lammle opens her nostrils and bites her

under-lip; Mr. Lammle takes his gingerous whiskers in his left hand, and, bringing them together, frowns furtively at his beloved, out of a thick gingerous bush.

“Do *I* mean to say!” Mrs. Lammle after a time repeats, with indignation. “Putting it on me! The unmanly disingenuousness!”

Mr. Lammle stops, releases his whiskers, and looks at her. “The what?”

Mrs. Lammle haughtily replies, without stopping, and without looking back. “The meanness.”

He is at her side again in a pace or two, and he retorts, “That is not what you said. You said disingenuousness.”

“What if I did?”

“There is no ‘if’ in the case. You did.”

“I did, then. And what of it?”

“What of it?” says Mr. Lammle. “Have you the face to utter the word to me?”

“The face, too!” replied Mrs. Lammle, staring at him with cold scorn. “Pray, how dare you, sir, utter the word to me?”

“I never did.”

As this happens to be true, Mrs. Lammle is thrown on the feminine resource of saying, “I don’t care what you uttered or did not utter.”

After a little more walking and a little more silence, Mr. Lammle breaks the latter.

“You shall proceed in your own way. You claim a right to ask me do I mean to tell you. Do I mean to tell you what?”

"That you are a man of property?"

"No."

"Then you married me on false pretences?"

"So be it. Next comes what you mean to say. Do you mean to say you are a woman of property?"

"No."

"Then you married me on false pretences."

"If you were so dull a fortune-hunter that you deceived yourself, or if you were so greedy and grasping that you were over-willing to be deceived by appearances, is it my fault, you adventurer?" the lady demands, with great asperity.

"I asked Veneering, and he told me you were rich."

"Veneering!" with great contempt. "And what does Veneering know about me!"

"Was he not your trustee?"

"No. I have no trustee, but the one you saw on the day when you fraudulently married me. And his trust is not a very difficult one, for it is only an annuity of a hundred and fifteen pounds. I think there are some odd shillings or pence, if you are very particular."

Mr. Lammle bestows a by no means loving look upon the partner of his joys and sorrows, and he mutters something; but checks himself.

"Question for question. It is my turn again, Mrs. Lammle. What made you suppose me a man of property?"

"You made me suppose you so. Perhaps you will

deny that you always presented yourself to me in that character?"

"But you asked somebody, too. Come, Mrs. Lammle, admission for admission. You asked somebody?"

"I asked Veneering."

"And Veneering knew as much of me as he knew of you, or as anybody knows of him."

After more silent walking, the bride stops short, to say in a passionate manner:

"I never will forgive the Veneerings for this!"

"Neither will I," returns the bridegroom.

With that, they walk again; she, making those angry spirits in the sand; he, dragging that dejected tail. The tide is low, and seems to have thrown them together high on the bare shore. A gull comes sweeping by their heads, and flouts them. There was a golden surface on the brown cliffs but now, and behold they are only damp earth. A taunting roar comes from the sea, and the far-out rollers mount upon one another, to look at the entrapped impostors, and to join in impish and exultant gambols.

"Do you pretend to believe," Mrs. Lammle resumes, sternly, "when you talk of my marrying you for worldly advantages, that it was within the bounds of reasonable probability that I would have married you for yourself?"

"Again there are two sides to the question, Mrs. Lammle. What do you pretend to believe?"

"So you first deceive me and then insult me!" cries the lady, with a heaving bosom.

"Not at all. I have originated nothing. The double-edged question was yours."

"Was mine!" the bride repeats, and her parasol breaks in her angry hand.

His colour has turned to a livid white, and ominous marks have come to light about his nose, as if the finger of the very devil himself had, within the last few moments, touched it here and there. But he has repressive power, and she has none.

"Throw it away," he coolly recommends as to the parasol; "you have made it useless; you look ridiculous with it."

Whereupon she calls him in her rage, "A deliberate villain," and so casts the broken thing from her as that it strikes him in falling. The finger-marks are something whiter for the instant, but he walks on at her side.

She bursts into tears, declaring herself the wretchedest, the most deceived, the worst-used, of women. Then she says that if she had the courage to kill herself, she would do it. Then she calls him vile impostor. Then she asks him, why, in the disappointment of his base speculation, he does not take her life with his own hand, under the present favourable circumstances. Then she cries again. Then she is enraged again, and makes some mention of swindlers. Finally, she sits down crying on a block of stone, and is in all the known and unknown humours of her sex at once. Pending her changes, those aforesaid marks in his face have come and gone, now here now there, like white stops of a pipe on which the diabolical performer has played a tune. Also his livid lips

are parted at last, as if he were breathless with running. Yet he is not.

"Now, get up, Mrs. Lammle, and let us speak reasonably."

She sits upon her stone, and takes no heed of him.

"Get up, I tell you."

Raising her head, she looks contemptuously in his face, and repeats, "You tell me! Tell me, forsooth!"

She affects not to know that his eyes are fastened on her as she droops her head again; but her whole figure reveals that she knows it uneasily.

"Enough of this. Come! Do you hear? Get up."

Yielding to his hand, she rises, and they walk again; but this time with their faces turned towards their place of residence.

"Mrs. Lammle, we have both been deceiving, and we have both been deceived. We have both been biting, and we have both been bitten. In a nut-shell, there's the state of the case."

"You sought me out —"

"Tut! Let us have done with that. *We* know very well how it was. Why should you and I talk about it, when you and I can't disguise it? To proceed. I am disappointed and cut a poor figure."

"Am I no one?"

"Some one — and I was coming to you, if you had waited a moment. You, too, are disappointed and cut a poor figure."

have been presently executed. The mature young lady has mighty little need of powder, now, for her downcast face, as he escorts her in the light of the setting sun to their abode of bliss.

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