OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PASSING SHADOW.

THE winds and tides rose and fell a certain number of times, the earth moved round the sun a certain number of times, the ship upon the ocean made her voyage safely, and brought a baby-Bella home. Then who so blest and happy as Mrs. John Rokesmith, saving and excepting Mr. John Rokesmith! "Would you not like to be rich now, my dar- ling?"

"How can you ask me such a question, John dear? Am I not rich?"

These were among the first words spoken near the baby-Bella as she lay asleep. She soon proved to be a baby of wonderful intelligence, evincing the strongest objection to her grand- mother's arrangement, and being invariably seized with a painful ailment of the stomach when that dignified lady honored her with any at- tention.

It was charming to see Bella contemplating this baby, and finding out her own idiosyncrasies in that tiny reflection, as if she were looking in the glass without personal vanity. Her cherubic father justly remarked to her husband that the baby seemed to make her younger than before, reminding him of the days when she had a pet doll and used to talk to it as she carried it about.

The world might have been challenged to pro- duce another baby who had such a store of pleasant nonsense said and sung to it, as Bella said and sung to this baby; or who was dressed and undressed as often in four-and-twenty hours as Bella dressed and undressed this baby; or who was held behind doors and joked out to stop its father's way when he came home, as this baby was; or, in a word, who did half the number of baby things, through the lively invention of a gay and proud young mother, that this inex- haustible baby did.

The inexhaustible baby was two or three months old when Bella began to notice a cloud upon her husband's brow. Watching it, she saw a gathering and deepening anxiety there, which caused her great disquiet. More than once she awoke him muttering in his sleep; and, though he muttered nothing worse than her own name, it was plain to her that his restlessness originated in some load of care. Therefore, Bella at length put in her claim to divide this load, and bear her half of it.

"You know, John dear," she said, cheerily reverting to their former conversation, "that I hope I may safely be trusted in great things. And it surely can not be a little thing that causes you so much uneasiness. It's very considerate of you to try to hide from me that you are un-

comfortable about something, but it's quite im- possible to do, John love."

"I admit that I am rather uneasy, my own."

"Then please to tell me what about, Sir."

"But no, he erred that. 'Never mind!' thought Bella, resolutely. "John requires me to put perfect faith in him, and he shall not be disappointed."

She went up to London one day to meet him, in order that they might make some purchases. She found him waiting for her at her journey's end, and they walked away together through the streets. He was in gay spirits, though still harping on that notion of their being rich; and he said, now let them make believe that yonder fine carriage was theirs, and that it was waiting to take them home to a fine house they had; what would Bella, in that case, best like to find in the house? Well, Bella didn't know; al- ready having every thing she wanted, she couldn't say. But by degrees she was led on to confess that she would like to have for the inexhaustible baby such a nursery as never was seen. It was to be "a very rainbow for colors," as she was quite sure baby noticed colors; and the stair- case was to be adorned with the most exquisite flowers, as she was absolutely certain baby no- ticed flowers; and there was to be an aviary some where, of the loveliest little birds, as there was not the smallest doubt in the world that baby noticed birds. Was there nothing else?

"No, John dear. The pre-illusions of the inex- haustible baby being provided for, Bella could think of nothing else."

They were chatting in this way, and John had suggested, "No jewels for your own wear, for instance?" and Bella had replied, laughing, "O! if he came to that, yes, there might be a beautiful ivory case of jewels on her dressing- table; when these pictures were in a moment darkened and blotted out."

They turned a corner, and met Mr. Light- wood.

He stopped as if he were petrified by the sight of Bella's husband, who in the same moment had changed color.

"Mr. Lightwood and I have met before," he said.

"Met before, John?" Bella repeated in a tone of wonder. "Mr. Lightwood told me he had never seen you."

"I did not then know that I had," said Light- wood, discomposed on her account. "I believed that I had only heard of—Mr. Rokesmith."

With an emphasis on the name.

"When Mr. Lightwood saw me, my love," observed her husband, not avoiding his eye, but looking at him, "my name was Julius Hand- ford."
Julius Handford! The name that Bella had so often seen in old newspapers, when she was an inmate of Mr. Boffin's house! Julius Handford, who had been publicly entreated to appear, and for intelligence of whom a reward had been publicly offered:

"I would have avoided mentioning it in your presence," said Lightwood to Bella, delicately; "but since your husband mentions it himself, I must confirm his strange admission. I saw him as Mr. Julius Handford, and I afterward (unquestionably to his knowledge) took great pains to trace him out."

"Quite true. But it was not my object or my interest," said Rokesmith, quietly, "to be traced on."

Bella looked from the one to the other in amazement.

"Mr. Lightwood," pursued her husband, "his chance has brought us face to face at last—which is not to be wondered at, for the wonder is, that, in spite of all my pains to the contrary, chance has not confronted us together sooner—I have only to remind you that you have been at my house, and to add that I have not changed my residence."

"Sir," returned Lightwood, with a meaning glance toward Bella, "my position is a truly painful one. I hope that no complicity in a very dark transaction may attach to you; but you can not fail to know that your own extraordinary conduct has laid you under suspicion."

"I know it has," was all the reply.

"My professional duty," said Lightwood, hesitating, with another glance toward Bella, "is greatly at variance with my personal inclination; but I doubt, Mr. Handford, or Mr. Rokesmith, whether I am justified in taking leave of you here, with your whole course unexplained."

Bella caught her husband by the hand.

"Don't be alarmed, my darling. Mr. Lightwood will find that he is quite justified in taking leave of me here. At all events," added Rokesmith, "he will find that I mean to take leave of him here."

"I think, Sir," said Lightwood, "you can scarcely deny that when I came to your house on the occasion to which you have referred you avoided me of a set purpose."

"Mr. Lightwood, I assure you I have no disposition to deny it, or intention to deny it. I should have continued to avoid you, in pursuance of the same set purpose, for a short time longer, if we had not met now. I am going straight home, and shall remain at home tomorrow until noon. Hereafter I hope we may be better acquainted. Good-day."

Lightwood stood irresolute, but Bella's husband passed him in the steadiest manner, with Bella on his arm; and they went home without encountering any further remonstrance or mal-estimation from any one.

When they had dined and were alone, John Rokesmith said to his wife, who had preserved her cheerfulness: "And you don't ask me, my dear, why I bore that name?"

"No, John love. I should dearly like to know, of course" (which her anxious face confirmed); "but I wait until you can tell me of your own free-will. You asked me if I could have perfect faith in you, and I said yes, and I meant it."

It did not escape Bella's notice that he began to look triumphant. She wanted no strengthening in her firmness; but if she had had need of any, she would have derived it from his kindling face.

"You can not have been prepared, my dearest, for such a discovery as that this mysterious Mr. Handford was identical with your husband?"

"No, John, dear, of course not. But you told me to prepare to be tried, and I prepared myself."

He drew her to nestle closer to him, and told her it would soon be over and the truth would soon appear. "And now," he went on, "I say, my dear, on these words that I am going to add. I stand in no kind of peril, and I can by possibility be hurt at no one's hand."

"You are quite, quite sure of that, John dear?"

"Not a hair of my head! Moreover, I have done no wrong, and have injured no man. Shall I swear it?"

"No, John!" cried Bella, laying her hand upon his lips with a proud look. "Never to me!"

"But circumstances," he went on "—I can, and I will, disperse them in a moment—have surrounded me with one of the strangest suspicions ever known. You heard Mr. Lightwood speak of a dark transaction?"

"Yes, John."

"You are prepared to hear explicitly what he meant?"

"Yes."

"You are ready to listen to that, and to hear what I have to say, and to believe me?"

"With a fast palpitating heart Bella grasped him by the arm. "You can not be suspected, John?"

"Dear love, I can be—for I am!"

There was silence between them as she sat looking in his face, with the color quite gone from her own face and lips. "How dare they!" she cried at length, in a burst of generous indignation. "My beloved husband, how dare they?"

He caught her in his arms as she opened her, and held her to his heart. "Even knowing this, you can trust me, Bella?"

"I can trust you, John dear, with all my soul. If I could not trust you, I should fall dead at your feet."

The kindling triumph in his face was bright indeed as he looked up and rapturously exclaimed,

what had he done to deserve the blessing of this dear, confiding creature's heart? Again she put her hand upon his lips, saying, "Hush!" and then told him, in her own little, natural,
pathetic way, that if all the world were against him she would be for him; that if all the world repudiated her she would believe him; that if he were infamous in other eyes he would be honored in hers; and that, under the worst unmerited suspicion, she would devote her life to consoling him, and imparting her own faith in him to her little child.

A twilight calm of happiness then succeeding to their radiant noon, they remained at peace until a strange voice in the room startled them both. The room being by that time dark, the voice said, "Don't let the lady be alarmed by my striking a light," and immediately a match rattled and glimmered in a hand. The hand and the match and the voice were then seen by John Rokesmith to belong to Mr. Inspector, once meditatively active in this chronicle.

"I take the liberty," said Mr. Inspector, in a business-like manner, "to bring myself to the recollection of Mr. Julius Handford, who gave me his name and address down at our place a considerable time ago. Would the lady object to my lighting the pair of candles on the chimney-piece, to throw a further light upon the subject? No? Thank you, ma'am. Now we look cheerful!"

Mr. Inspector, in a dark-blue buttoned-up frock-coat and pantaloons, presented a serviceable, half-pay, Royal Arms kind of appearance, as he applied his pocket-handkerchief to his nose and bowed to the lady.

"You favored me, Mr. Handford," said Mr. Inspector, "by writing down your name and address, and I produce the piece of paper on which you wrote it. Comparing the same with the writing on the fly-leaf of this book on the table—and a sweet pretty volume it is—I find the writing of the entry, 'Mrs. John Rokesmith. From her husband on her birthday'—and very gratifying to the feelings such memorials are—to correspond exactly. Can I have a word with you?"

"Certainly. Here, if you please," was the reply.

"Why," retorted Mr. Inspector, again using his pocket handkerchief, "though there's nothing for the lady to be at all alarmed at, still, ladies are apt to take alarm at matters of business—being of that fragile sex that they're not accustomed to when not of a strictly domestic character—and I do generally make it a rule to propose retirement from the presence of ladies, before entering upon business topics. Or perhaps, Mr. Inspector hinted, "if the lady was to step up stairs, and take a look at baby now!"

"Mrs. Rokesmith," her husband was beginning; when Mr. Inspector, regarding the words as an introduction, said, "Happy, I am sure, to have the honor." And bowed, with gallantry.

"Mrs. Rokesmith," resumed her husband, "is satisfied that she can have no reason for being alarmed, whatever the business is."

"Really? Is that so?" said Mr. Inspector.

"But it's a sex to live and learn from, and there's nothing a lady can't accomplish when she once fully gives her mind to it. It's the case with my own wife. Well, ma'am, this good gentleman of yours has given rise to a rather large amount of trouble which might have been avoided if he had come forward and explained himself. Well you see! He didn't come forward and explain himself. Consequently, now that we meet, him and me, you'll say—and say right—that there's nothing to be alarmed at, in my proposing to him to come forward—or, putting the same meaning in another form, to come along with me—and explain himself."

When Mr. Inspector put it in that other form, "to come along with me," there was a relishing roll in his voice, and his eye beamed with an official lustre.

"Do you propose to take me into custody?" inquired John Rokesmith, very coolly.

"Why argue?" returned Mr. Inspector in a comfortable sort of remonstrance; "ain't it enough that I propose that you shall come along with me?"

"For what reason?"

"Lord bless my soul and body!" returned Mr. Inspector, "I wonder at it in a man of your education. Why argue?"

"What do you charge against me?"

"I wonder at you before a lady," said Mr. Inspector, shaking his head reproachfully: "I wonder, brought up as you have been, you haven't a more delicate mind! I charge you, then, with being some way concerned in the Harmon Murder. I don't say whether before, or in, or after, the fact. I don't say whether with having some knowledge of it that hasn't come out."

"You don't surprise me. I foresee your visit this afternoon."

"Don't!" said Mr. Inspector. "Why, why argue? It's my duty to inform you that whatever you say will be used against you."

"I don't think it will."

"But I tell you it will," said Mr. Inspector.

"Now, having received the caution, do you still say that you foresee my visit this afternoon?"

"Yes. And I will say something more, if you will step with me into the next room."

With a reassuring kiss on the lips of the frightened Bella, her husband (to whom Mr. Inspector obligingly offered his arm) took up a candle and withdrew with that gentleman. They were a full half-hour in conference. When they returned Mr. Inspector looked considerably astonished.

"I have invited this worthy officer, my dear," said John, "to make a short excursion with me in which you shall be a sharer. He will take something to eat and drink, I dare say, on your invitation, while you are getting your bonnet on."

Mr. Inspector declined eating, but assented to the proposal of a glass of brandy and water. Mixing this cold, and pensively consuming it, he broke at intervals into such soliloquies as that
he never did know such a move, that he never had been so graved, and that what a game was this they were playing. A sort of stuff a man's opinion of himself was made of! Concurrently with these comments, he more than once burst out a laughing, with the half-enjoying and half-plied air of a man who had given up a good conundrum, after much guessing, and been told the answer. Bella was so timid of him, that she noted these things in a half-shrinking, half-perceptive way, and similarly noted that there was a great change in his manner toward John. That coming-along-with-him deportment was now lost in long mas- sing looks at John and at herself, and sometimes in slow heavy rubs of his hand across his fore- head, as if he were ironing out the creases which his deep pondering made there. He had had some coughing and whistling satellites secretly gravitating toward him about the premises, but they were now dismissed, and he eyed John as if he had meant to do him a public service, but had unfortunately been anticipated. Whether Bella might have noted anything more, if she had been less afraid of him, she could not de- termine; but it was all inexplicable to her, and not the faintest flash of the real state of the case broke in upon her mind. Mr. Inspector's in- creased notice of herself, and knowing way of raising his eyebrows when their eyes by any chance met, as if he put the question "Don't you see?" augmented her timidity, and, conse- quently, her perplexity. For all these reasons, when he and she and John, at toward nine o'clock of a winter evening, went to London, and began driving from London Bridge, among low- lying water-side wharves and docks and strange places, Bella was in the state of a dreamer; per- fectly unable to account for her being there, per- fectly unable to forecast what would happen next, or whether she was going, or why; certain of nothing in the immediate present, but that she confided in John, and that John seemed somehow to be getting more triumphant. But what a certainty was that!

They alighted at last at the corner of a court, where there was a building with a bright lamp and a wicket gate. Its orderly appearance was very unlike that of the surrounding neighbor- hood, and was explained by the inscription Poi- lice Station.

"We are not going in here, John?" said Bella, clinging to him.

"Yes, my dear; but of our own accord. We shall come out again as easily, never fear."

The whitewashed room was pure white as of old, the methodical book-keeping was in peace- ful progress as of old, and some distant howler was hanging against a coil door as of old. The sanctuary was not a permanent abiding-place; but a kind of criminal Pickford's. The lower passions and vices were regularly ticked off in the books, warehoused in the cells, carted away as per accompanying invoice, and left no mark upon it.

Mr. Inspector placed two chairs for his visit-
my making, and if even you can find out better
I shall be glad to know where." Filling him,
with hospitable hands, a steaming tumbler, Miss
Abbey replaced the jug by the fire; the com-
pany not having yet arrived at the slip stage of
their supper, but being as yet skirmishing
with strong ale.

"Ah—h!" cried Mr. Inspector. "That's the
smack! There's not a Detective in the Force,
Miss Abbey, that could find out better stuff
than that."

"Glad to hear you say so," rejoined Miss Ab-
bery. "You ought to know, if any body does."

"Mr. Job Potterson," Mr. Inspector contin-
ued, "I drink your health. Mr. Jacob Kibble,
I drink yours. Hope you have made a prosper-
ous voyage home, gentlemen both."

Mr. Kibble, an unctuous broad man of few
words and many mouthfuls, said, more briefly
than pointedly, raising his ale to his lips: "Same
to you." Mr. Job Potterton, a semi-sea-faring
man of oblique demeanor, said, "Thank you,
Sir."

"Lord bless my soul and body!" cried Mr.
Inspector. "Talk of trade, Miss Abbey, and
the way they set their marks on men" (a subject
which nobody had approached); who wouldn't
know your brother to be a Steward! There's a
bright and ready twinkle in his eye, there's a
neatness in his action, there's a smartness in
his figure, there's an air of reliability about him
in case you wanted a basin, which points out the
steward! And Mr. Kibble--ain't he Passenger,
all over? While there's that mercantile cut upon
him which would make you happy to give him
credit for five hundred pound, don't you see the
salt sea shining on him too?"

"You do, I dare say," returned Miss Abbey,
"but I don't. And as for stewarding, I think it's
time my brother gave that up, and took this
House in hand on his sister's retiring. The
House will go to pieces if he don't. I wouldn't
sell it for any money that could be told out, to
a person that I couldn't depend upon to be a Law
to the Porters, as I have been."

"There you're right, Miss," said Mr. Inspect-
or. "A better kept house is not known to our
men. What do I say? Half as well a kept
house is not known to our men. Show the Force
the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters, and the Force
--to a constable--will show you a piece of
perfection, Mr. Kibble."

That gentleman, with a very serious shake of
his head, subscribed the article.

"And talk of Time slipping by you, as if it
was an animal at rustic sports with its tail
snapped," said Mr. Inspector (again, a subject
which nobody had approached); "why, well you
may. Well you may. How has it slipped
by us, since the time when Mr. Job Potterson
here present, Mr. Jacob Kibble here present,
and an Officer of the Force here present, first
came together on a matter of Identification?"

Bella's husband stopped softly to the half-door
of the bar, and stood there.

"How has Time slipped by us," Mr. Inspect-
or went on, slowly, with his eyes narrowly ob-
serving of the two guests, "since we three very
men, at an Inquest in this very house—Mr. Kib-
ble? Taken ill, Sir?"

Mr. Kibble had staggered up, with his lower
jaw dropped, catching Potterton by the shoul-
der, and pointing to the half-door. He now
cried out: "Potterton! Look! Look there!"
Potterton started up, started back, and exclam-
ed: "Heaven defend us, what's that?" Bella's
husband stepped back to Bella, took her in his
arms (for she was terrified by the unintelligible
terror of the two men), and shut the door of the
little room. A hurry of voices succeeded, in
which Mr. Inspector's voice was busiest; it grad-
ually slackened and sank; and Mr. Inspector re-
appeared. "Sharp's the word, Sir!" he said,
looking in with a knowing wink. "We'll get
your lady out at once." Immediately Bella and
her husband were under the stars, making their
way back alone to the vehicle they had kept in
waiting.

All this was most extraordinary, and Bella
could make nothing of it but that John was in
the right. How in the right, and how suspect-
ed of being in the wrong, she could not divine.
Some vague idea that he had never really as-
sumed the name of Handford, and that there
was a remarkable likeness between him and that
mysterious person, was her nearest approach to
any definite explanation. But John was tri-
umphant; that much was made apparent; and
she could wait for the rest.

When John came home to dinner next day
he said, sitting down on the sofa by Bella and
baby-Bella: "My dear, I have a piece of news
to tell you. I have left the Chinn House."

As he seemed to like having left it, Bella took
it for granted that there was no misfortune in
the case.

"In a word, my love," said John, "the Chinn
House is broken up and abolished. There is no
such thing any more."

"Then are you already in another House, John?"

"Yes, my darling. I am in another way of
business. And I am rather better off."

The inexhaustible baby was instantly made
to congratulate him, and to say, with appropriate
action on the part of a very limp arm and a
speckled fist: "Three cheers, ladies and gem-
perorums. Hoo--ray!"

"I am afraid, my life," said John, "that you
have become very much attached to this cot-
tage?"

"Afraid I have, John? Of course I have."

"The reason why I said afraid," returned
John, "is, because we must move."

"O John!"

"Yes, my dear, we must move. We must have
our head-quarters in London now. In short,
there's a dwelling-house rent-free, attached to
my new position, and we must occupy it."

"That's a gain, John."
"Yes, my dear, it is undoubtedly a gain."

He gave her a very blithe look, and a very sly look. Which occasioned the inexhaustible baby to square at him with the speckled fists, and demand in a threatening manner what he meant?

"My love, you said it was a gain, and I said it was a gain. A very innocent remark, surely."

"I won't," said the inexhaustible baby, "—allow—you—to make—game—of—my—venerable—Ma." At each division administering a soft facer with one of the speckled fists.

John having stooped down to receive these punishing visitations, Bella asked him, would it be necessary to move soon? Why yes, indeed (said John), he did propose that they should move very soon. Taking the furniture with them, of course (said Bella)? Why, no (said John), the fact was, that the house was—in a sort of a kind of a way—furnished already.

The inexhaustible baby, hearing this, resumed the offensive, and said: "But there's no nursery for me, Sir. What do you mean, marble-hearted parents?" To which the marble-hearted parent rejoiced that there was a—sort of a kind of—nursery, and it might be "made to do." "Made to do?" returned the Inexhaustible, administering more punishment; "what do you take me for?" And was then turned over on its back in Bella's lap, and smothered with kisses.

"But really, John dear," said Bella, flushed in quite a lovely manner by these exercices, "will the new house, just as it stands, do for baby? That's the question."

"I felt that to be the question," he returned, "and therefore I arranged that you should come with me and look at it to-morrow morning." Appointment made, accordingly, for Bella to go up with him to-morrow morning; John kissed; and Bella delighted.

When they reached London in pursuance of their little plan they took coach and drove westward. Not only drove westward, but drove into that particular westward division which Bella had seen last when she turned her face from Mr. Boffin's door. Not only drove into that particular division, but drove at last into that very street. Not only drove into that very street, but stopped at last at that very house.

"John dear!" cried Bella, looking out of window in a flutter. "Do you see where we are?"

"Yes, my love. The coachman's quite right."

The house-door was opened without any knocking or ringing, and John promptly helped her out. The servant who stood holding the door asked no question of John, neither did he go before them or follow them as they went straight up stairs. It was only her husband's encircling arm, urging her on, that prevented Bella from stopping at the foot of the staircase. As they ascended, it was seen to be tastefully ornamented with most beautiful flowers.

"O John!" said Bella, faintly. "What does this mean?"

"Nothing, my darling, nothing. Let us go on."

Going on a little higher, they came to a charming aviary, in which a number of tropical birds, more gorgeous in color than the flowers, were flying about; and among those birds were gold and silver fish, and mosses, and water-lilies, and a fountain, and all manner of wonders.

"O my dear John!" said Bella. "What does this mean?"

"Nothing, my darling, nothing. Let us go on."

They went on, until they came to a door. As John put out his hand to open it, Bella caught his hand.

"I don't know what it means, but it's too much for me. Hold me, John, love." John caught her up in his arm, and lightly dashed into the room with her.

Behold Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, beaming! Behold Mrs. Boffin clapping her hands in a ecstasy, running to Bella with tears of joy pouring down her comely face, and folding her to her comfortable breast, with the words: "My dear, deary, deary girl, that Nobdy and me saw married and couldn't wish joy to, or so much as speak to! My deary, deary, deary, wife of John and mother of his little child! My loving loving, bright bright, Pretty Pretty! Welcome to your house and home, my deary!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SHOWING HOW THE GOLDEN HUSK MAN HELPED TO SCATTER DUST.

Is all the first bewildering of her wonder, the most bewilderingly wonderful thing to Bella was the shining countenance of Mr. Boffin. That his wife should be joyous, open-hearted, and genial, or that her face should express every quality that was large and trusting, and no quality that was little or mean, was accordant with Bella's experience. But that he, with a perfectly beneficent air and a plump rosy face, should be standing there, looking at her and John, like some jovial good spirit, was marvelous. For, how had he looked when she last saw him in that very room (it was the room in which she had given him that piece of her mind at parting), and what had become of all those crooked lines of suspicion, avarice, and distrust, that twisted his visage then?

Mrs. Boffin seated Bella on the large ottoman, and seated herself beside her, and John her husband seated himself on the other side of her, and Mr. Boffin stood beaming at every one and every thing he could see, with surpassing jollity and enjoyment. Mrs. Boffin was then taken with a laughing fit of clapping her hands, and clapping her knees, and rocking herself to and fro, and then with another laughing fit of embracing Bel-
Three young women from very different backgrounds meet, become friends and share experiences when they all gain positions as nannies in the wealthy households of London's exclusive Berkeley Square. Stars: Victoria Smurfit, Clare Wilkie, Tabitha Wady. Next ».