

Chapter 3 - A Piece Of Work

Britannia, sitting meditating one fine day (perhaps in the attitude in which she is presented on the copper coinage), discovers all of a sudden that she wants Veneering in Parliament. It occurs to her that Veneering is 'a representative man' - which cannot in these times be doubted - and that Her Majesty's faithful Commons are incomplete without him. So, Britannia mentions to a legal gentleman of her acquaintance that if Veneering will 'put down' five thousand pounds, he may write a couple of initial letters after his name at the extremely cheap rate of two thousand five hundred per letter. It is clearly understood between Britannia and the legal gentleman that nobody is to take up the five thousand pounds, but that being put down they will disappear by magical conjuration and enchantment.

The legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence going straight from that lady to Veneering, thus commissioned, Veneering declares himself highly flattered, but requires breathing time to ascertain 'whether his friends will rally round him.' Above all things, he says, it behoves him to be clear, at a crisis of this importance, 'whether his friends will rally round him.' The legal gentleman, in the interests of his client cannot allow much time for this purpose, as the lady rather thinks she knows somebody prepared to put down six thousand pounds; but he says he will give Veneering four hours.

Veneering then says to Mrs Veneering, 'We must work,' and throws himself into a Hansom cab. Mrs Veneering in the same moment relinquishes baby to Nurse; presses her aquiline hands upon her brow, to arrange the throbbing intellect within; orders out the carriage; and repeats in a distracted and devoted manner, compounded of Ophelia and any self-immolating female of antiquity you may prefer, 'We must work.'

Veneering having instructed his driver to charge at the Public in the streets, like the Life-Guards at Waterloo, is driven furiously to Duke Street, Saint James's. There, he finds Twemlow in his lodgings, fresh from the hands of a secret artist who has been doing something to his hair with yolks of eggs. The process requiring that Twemlow shall, for two hours after the application, allow his hair to stick upright and dry gradually, he is in an appropriate state for the receipt of startling intelligence; looking equally like the Monument on Fish Street Hill, and King Priam on a certain incendiary occasion not wholly unknown as a neat point from the classics.

'My dear Twemlow,' says Veneering, grasping both his hands, as the dearest and oldest of my friends - '

('Then there can be no more doubt about it in future,' thinks Twemlow, 'and I AM!')

' - Are you of opinion that your cousin, Lord Snigsworth, would give his name as a Member of my Committee? I don't go so far as to ask for his lordship; I only ask for his name. Do you think he would give me his name?'

In sudden low spirits, Twemlow replies, 'I don't think he would.'

'My political opinions,' says Veneering, not previously aware of having any, 'are identical with those of Lord Snigsworth, and perhaps as a matter of public feeling and public principle, Lord Snigsworth would give me his name.'

'It might be so,' says Twemlow; 'but - ' And perplexedly scratching his head, forgetful of the yolks of eggs, is the more discomfited by being reminded how sticky he is.

'Between such old and intimate friends as ourselves,' pursues Veneering, 'there should in such a case be no reserve. Promise me that if I ask you to do anything for me which you don't like to do, or feel the slightest difficulty in doing, you will freely tell me so.'

This, Twemlow is so kind as to promise, with every appearance of most heartily intending to keep his word.

'Would you have any objection to write down to Snigsworthy Park, and ask this favour of Lord Snigsworth? Of course if it were granted I should know that I owed it solely to you; while at the same time you would put it to Lord Snigsworth entirely upon public grounds. Would you have any objection?'

Says Twemlow, with his hand to his forehead, 'You have exacted a promise from me.'

'I have, my dear Twemlow.'

'And you expect me to keep it honourably.'

'I do, my dear Twemlow.'

'ON the whole, then; - observe me,' urges Twemlow with great nicety, as if; in the case of its having been off the whole, he would have done it directly - 'ON the whole, I must beg you to excuse me from addressing any communication to Lord Snigsworth.'

'Bless you, bless you!' says Veneering; horribly disappointed, but grasping him by both hands again, in a particularly fervent manner.

It is not to be wondered at that poor Twemlow should decline to inflict a letter on his noble cousin (who has gout in the temper), inasmuch as his noble cousin, who allows him a small annuity on which he lives, takes it out of him, as the phrase goes, in extreme severity; putting him, when he visits at Snigsworthy Park, under a kind of martial law; ordaining that he shall hang his hat on a particular peg, sit on a particular chair, talk on particular subjects to particular people, and perform particular exercises: such as sounding the praises of the Family Varnish (not to say Pictures), and abstaining from the choicest of the Family Wines unless expressly invited to partake.

'One thing, however, I CAN do for you,' says Twemlow; 'and that is, work for you.'

Veneering blesses him again.

'I'll go,' says Twemlow, in a rising hurry of spirits, 'to the club; - let us see now; what o'clock is it?'

'Twenty minutes to eleven.'

'I'll be,' says Twemlow, 'at the club by ten minutes to twelve, and I'll never leave it all day.'

Veneering feels that his friends are rallying round him, and says, 'Thank you, thank you. I knew I could rely upon you. I said to Anastatia before leaving home just now to come to you - of course the first friend I have seen on a subject so momentous to me, my dear Twemlow - I said to Anastatia, "We must work."'

'You were right, you were right,' replies Twemlow. 'Tell me. Is SHE working?'

'She is,' says Veneering.

'Good!' cries Twemlow, polite little gentleman that he is. 'A woman's tact is invaluable. To have the dear sex with us, is to have everything with us.'

'But you have not imparted to me,' remarks Veneering, 'what you think of my entering the House of Commons?'

'I think,' rejoins Twemlow, feelingly, 'that it is the best club in London.'

Veneering again blesses him, plunges down stairs, rushes into his Hansom, and directs the driver to be up and at the British Public, and to charge into the City.

Meanwhile Twemlow, in an increasing hurry of spirits, gets his hair down as well as he can - which is not very well; for, after these glutinous applications it is restive, and has a surface on it somewhat in the nature of pastry - and gets to the club by the appointed time. At the club he promptly secures a large window, writing materials, and all the newspapers, and establishes himself; immoveable, to be respectfully contemplated by Pall Mall. Sometimes, when a man enters who nods to him, Twemlow says, 'Do you know Veneering?' Man says, 'No; member of the club?' Twemlow says, 'Yes. Coming in for Pocket-Breaches.' Man says, 'Ah! Hope he may find it worth the money!' yawns, and saunters out. Towards six o'clock of the afternoon, Twemlow begins to persuade himself that he is positively jaded with work, and thinks it much to be regretted that he was not brought up as a Parliamentary agent.

From Twemlow's, Veneering dashes at Podsnap's place of business. Finds Podsnap reading the paper, standing, and inclined to be oratorical over the astonishing discovery he has made, that Italy is not England. Respectfully entreats Podsnap's pardon for stopping the flow of his words of wisdom, and informs him what is in the wind. Tells Podsnap that their political opinions are identical. Gives Podsnap to understand that he, Veneering, formed his political opinions while sitting at the feet of him, Podsnap. Seeks earnestly to know whether Podsnap 'will rally round him?'

Says Podsnap, something sternly, 'Now, first of all, Veneering, do you ask my advice?'

Veneering falters that as so old and so dear a friend -

'Yes, yes, that's all very well,' says Podsnap; 'but have you made up your mind to take this borough of Pocket-Breaches on its own terms, or do you ask my opinion whether you shall take it or leave it alone?'

Veneering repeats that his heart's desire and his soul's thirst are, that Podsnap shall rally round him.

'Now, I'll be plain with you, Veneering,' says Podsnap, knitting his brows. 'You will infer that I don't care about Parliament, from the fact of my not being there?'

Why, of course Veneering knows that! Of course Veneering knows that if Podsnap chose to go there, he would be there, in a space of time that might be stated by the light and thoughtless as a jiffy.

'It is not worth my while,' pursues Podsnap, becoming handsomely mollified, 'and it is the reverse of important to my position. But it is not my wish to set myself up as law for another man, differently situated. You think it IS worth YOUR while, and IS important to YOUR position. Is that so?'

Always with the proviso that Podsnap will rally round him, Veneering thinks it is so.

'Then you don't ask my advice,' says Podsnap. 'Good. Then I won't give it you. But you do ask my help. Good. Then I'll work for you.'

Veneering instantly blesses him, and apprises him that Twemlow is already working. Podsnap does not quite approve that anybody should be already working - regarding it rather in the light of a liberty - but tolerates Twemlow, and says he is a well-connected old female who will do no harm.

'I have nothing very particular to do to-day,' adds Podsnap, 'and I'll mix with some influential people. I had engaged myself to dinner, but I'll send Mrs Podsnap and get off going myself; and I'll dine with you at eight. It's important we should report progress and compare notes. Now, let me see. You ought to have a couple of active energetic fellows, of gentlemanly manners, to go about.'

Veneering, after cogitation, thinks of Boots and Brewer.

'Whom I have met at your house,' says Podsnap. 'Yes. They'll do very well. Let them each have a cab, and go about.'

Veneering immediately mentions what a blessing he feels it, to possess a friend capable of such grand administrative suggestions, and really is elated at this going about of Boots and Brewer, as an idea wearing an electioneering aspect and looking desperately like business. Leaving Podsnap, at a hand-gallop, he descends upon Boots and Brewer, who enthusiastically rally round him by at once bolting off in cabs, taking opposite directions. Then Veneering repairs to the legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence, and with him transacts some delicate affairs of business, and issues an address to the independent electors of Pocket-Breaches, announcing that he is coming among them for their suffrages, as the mariner returns to the home of his early childhood: a phrase which is none the worse for his never having been near the place in his life, and not even now distinctly knowing where it is.

Mrs Veneering, during the same eventful hours, is not idle. No sooner does the carriage turn out, all complete, than she turns into it, all complete, and gives the word 'To Lady Tippins's.' That charmer dwells

over a staymaker's in the Belgravian Borders, with a life-size model in the window on the ground floor of a distinguished beauty in a blue petticoat, stay-lace in hand, looking over her shoulder at the town in innocent surprise. As well she may, to find herself dressing under the circumstances.

Lady Tippins at home? Lady Tippins at home, with the room darkened, and her back (like the lady's at the ground-floor window, though for a different reason) cunningly turned towards the light. Lady Tippins is so surprised by seeing her dear Mrs Veneering so early - in the middle of the night, the pretty creature calls it - that her eyelids almost go up, under the influence of that emotion.

To whom Mrs Veneering incoherently communicates, how that Veneering has been offered Pocket-Breaches; how that it is the time for rallying round; how that Veneering has said 'We must work'; how that she is here, as a wife and mother, to entreat Lady Tippins to work; how that the carriage is at Lady Tippins's disposal for purposes of work; how that she, proprietress of said bran new elegant equipage, will return home on foot - on bleeding feet if need be - to work (not specifying how), until she drops by the side of baby's crib.

'My love,' says Lady Tippins, 'compose yourself; we'll bring him in.' And Lady Tippins really does work, and work the Veneering horses too; for she clatters about town all day, calling upon everybody she knows, and showing her entertaining powers and green fan to immense advantage, by rattling on with, My dear soul, what do you think? What do you suppose me to be? You'll never guess. I'm pretending to be an electioneering agent. And for what place of all places? Pocket-Breaches. And why? Because the dearest friend I have in the world has bought it. And who is the dearest friend I have in the world? A man of the name of Veneering. Not omitting his wife, who is the other dearest friend I have in the world; and I positively declare I forgot their baby, who is the other. And we are carrying on this little farce to keep up appearances, and isn't it refreshing! Then, my precious child, the fun of it is that nobody knows who these Veneerings are, and that they know nobody, and that they have a house out of the Tales of the Genii, and give dinners out of the Arabian Nights. Curious to see 'em, my dear? Say you'll know 'em. Come and dine with 'em. They shan't bore you. Say who shall meet you. We'll make up a party of our own, and I'll engage that they shall not interfere with you for one single moment. You really ought to see their gold and silver camels. I call their dinner-table, the Caravan. Do come and dine with my Veneerings, my own Veneerings, my exclusive property, the dearest friends I have in the world! And above all, my dear, be sure you promise me your vote and interest and all sorts of plumpers for Pocket-Breaches; for we couldn't think of spending

sixpence on it, my love, and can only consent to be brought in by the spontaneous thingummies of the incorruptible whatdoyoucallums.

Now, the point of view seized by the bewitching Tippins, that this same working and rallying round is to keep up appearances, may have something in it, but not all the truth. More is done, or considered to be done - which does as well - by taking cabs, and 'going about,' than the fair Tippins knew of. Many vast vague reputations have been made, solely by taking cabs and going about. This particularly obtains in all Parliamentary affairs. Whether the business in hand be to get a man in, or get a man out, or get a man over, or promote a railway, or jockey a railway, or what else, nothing is understood to be so effectual as scouring nowhere in a violent hurry - in short, as taking cabs and going about.

Probably because this reason is in the air, Twemlow, far from being singular in his persuasion that he works like a Trojan, is capped by Podsnap, who in his turn is capped by Boots and Brewer. At eight o'clock when all these hard workers assemble to dine at Veneering's, it is understood that the cabs of Boots and Brewer mustn't leave the door, but that pails of water must be brought from the nearest baiting-place, and cast over the horses' legs on the very spot, lest Boots and Brewer should have instant occasion to mount and away. Those fleet messengers require the Analytical to see that their hats are deposited where they can be laid hold of at an instant's notice; and they dine (remarkably well though) with the air of firemen in charge of an engine, expecting intelligence of some tremendous conflagration.

Mrs Veneering faintly remarks, as dinner opens, that many such days would be too much for her.

'Many such days would be too much for all of us,' says Podsnap; 'but we'll bring him in!'

'We'll bring him in,' says Lady Tippins, sportively waving her green fan. 'Veneering for ever!'

'We'll bring him in!' says Twemlow.

'We'll bring him in!' say Boots and Brewer.

Strictly speaking, it would be hard to show cause why they should not bring him in, Pocket-Breaches having closed its little bargain, and there being no opposition. However, it is agreed that they must 'work' to the last, and that if they did not work, something indefinite would happen. It is likewise agreed that they are all so exhausted with the work behind them, and need to be so fortified for the work before them, as to require peculiar strengthening from Veneering's cellar.

Therefore, the Analytical has orders to produce the cream of the cream of his binns, and therefore it falls out that rallying becomes rather a trying word for the occasion; Lady Tippins being observed gamely to inculcate the necessity of rearing round their dear Veneering; Podsnap advocating roaring round him; Boots and Brewer declaring their intention of reeling round him; and Veneering thanking his devoted friends one and all, with great emotion, for rarullarulling round him.

In these inspiring moments, Brewer strikes out an idea which is the great hit of the day. He consults his watch, and says (like Guy Fawkes), he'll now go down to the House of Commons and see how things look.

'I'll keep about the lobby for an hour or so,' says Brewer, with a deeply mysterious countenance, 'and if things look well, I won't come back, but will order my cab for nine in the morning.'

'You couldn't do better,' says Podsnap.

Veneering expresses his inability ever to acknowledge this last service. Tears stand in Mrs Veneering's affectionate eyes. Boots shows envy, loses ground, and is regarded as possessing a second-rate mind. They all crowd to the door, to see Brewer off. Brewer says to his driver, 'Now, is your horse pretty fresh?' eyeing the animal with critical scrutiny. Driver says he's as fresh as butter. 'Put him along then,' says Brewer; 'House of Commons.' Driver darts up, Brewer leaps in, they cheer him as he departs, and Mr Podsnap says, 'Mark my words, sir. That's a man of resource; that's a man to make his way in life.'

When the time comes for Veneering to deliver a neat and appropriate stammer to the men of Pocket-Breaches, only Podsnap and Twemlow accompany him by railway to that sequestered spot. The legal gentleman is at the Pocket-Breaches Branch Station, with an open carriage with a printed bill 'Veneering for ever' stuck upon it, as if it were a wall; and they gloriously proceed, amidst the grins of the populace, to a feeble little town hall on crutches, with some onions and bootlaces under it, which the legal gentleman says are a Market; and from the front window of that edifice Veneering speaks to the listening earth. In the moment of his taking his hat off, Podsnap, as per agreement made with Mrs Veneering, telegraphs to that wife and mother, 'He's up.'

Veneering loses his way in the usual No Thoroughfares of speech, and Podsnap and Twemlow say Hear hear! and sometimes, when he can't by any means back himself out of some very unlucky No Thoroughfare, 'He-a-a-r He-a-a-r!' with an air of facetious conviction, as if the ingenuity of the thing gave them a sensation of exquisite pleasure. But Veneering makes two remarkably good points; so good,

that they are supposed to have been suggested to him by the legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence, while briefly conferring on the stairs.

Point the first is this. Veneering institutes an original comparison between the country, and a ship; pointedly calling the ship, the Vessel of the State, and the Minister the Man at the Helm. Veneering's object is to let Pocket-Breaches know that his friend on his right (Podsnap) is a man of wealth. Consequently says he, 'And, gentlemen, when the timbers of the Vessel of the State are unsound and the Man at the Helm is unskilful, would those great Marine Insurers, who rank among our world-famed merchant-princes - would they insure her, gentlemen? Would they underwrite her? Would they incur a risk in her? Would they have confidence in her? Why, gentlemen, if I appealed to my honourable friend upon my right, himself among the greatest and most respected of that great and much respected class, he would answer No!'

Point the second is this. The telling fact that Twemlow is related to Lord Snigsworth, must be let off. Veneering supposes a state of public affairs that probably never could by any possibility exist (though this is not quite certain, in consequence of his picture being unintelligible to himself and everybody else), and thus proceeds. 'Why, gentlemen, if I were to indicate such a programme to any class of society, I say it would be received with derision, would be pointed at by the finger of scorn. If I indicated such a programme to any worthy and intelligent tradesman of your town - nay, I will here be personal, and say Our town - what would he reply? He would reply, 'Away with it!' That's what HE would reply, gentlemen. In his honest indignation he would reply, 'Away with it!' But suppose I mounted higher in the social scale. Suppose I drew my arm through the arm of my respected friend upon my left, and, walking with him through the ancestral woods of his family, and under the spreading beeches of Snigsworthy Park, approached the noble hall, crossed the courtyard, entered by the door, went up the staircase, and, passing from room to room, found myself at last in the august presence of my friend's near kinsman, Lord Snigsworth. And suppose I said to that venerable earl, 'My Lord, I am here before your lordship, presented by your lordship's near kinsman, my friend upon my left, to indicate that programme;' what would his lordship answer? Why, he would answer, 'Away with it!' That's what he would answer, gentlemen. 'Away with it!' Unconsciously using, in his exalted sphere, the exact language of the worthy and intelligent tradesman of our town, the near and dear kinsman of my friend upon my left would answer in his wrath, 'Away with it!'

Veneering finishes with this last success, and Mr Podsnap telegraphs to Mrs Veneering, 'He's down.'

Then, dinner is had at the Hotel with the legal gentleman, and then there are in due succession, nomination, and declaration. Finally Mr Podsnap telegraphs to Mrs Veneering, 'We have brought him in.'

Another gorgeous dinner awaits them on their return to the Veneering halls, and Lady Tippins awaits them, and Boots and Brewer await them. There is a modest assertion on everybody's part that everybody single-handed 'brought him in'; but in the main it is conceded by all, that that stroke of business on Brewer's part, in going down to the house that night to see how things looked, was the master-stroke.

A touching little incident is related by Mrs Veneering, in the course of the evening. Mrs Veneering is habitually disposed to be tearful, and has an extra disposition that way after her late excitement. Previous to withdrawing from the dinner-table with Lady Tippins, she says, in a pathetic and physically weak manner:

'You will all think it foolish of me, I know, but I must mention it. As I sat by Baby's crib, on the night before the election, Baby was very uneasy in her sleep.'

The Analytical chemist, who is gloomily looking on, has diabolical impulses to suggest 'Wind' and throw up his situation; but represses them.

'After an interval almost convulsive, Baby curled her little hands in one another and smiled.'

Mrs Veneering stopping here, Mr Podsnap deems it incumbent on him to say: 'I wonder why!'

'Could it be, I asked myself,' says Mrs Veneering, looking about her for her pocket-handkerchief, 'that the Fairies were telling Baby that her papa would shortly be an M. P.?'

So overcome by the sentiment is Mrs Veneering, that they all get up to make a clear stage for Veneering, who goes round the table to the rescue, and bears her out backward, with her feet impressively scraping the carpet: after remarking that her work has been too much for her strength. Whether the fairies made any mention of the five thousand pounds, and it disagreed with Baby, is not speculated upon.

Poor little Twemlow, quite done up, is touched, and still continues touched after he is safely housed over the livery-stable yard in Duke Street, Saint James's. But there, upon his sofa, a tremendous consideration breaks in upon the mild gentleman, putting all softer considerations to the rout.

'Gracious heavens! Now I have time to think of it, he never saw one of his constituents in all his days, until we saw them together!'

After having paced the room in distress of mind, with his hand to his forehead, the innocent Twemlow returns to his sofa and moans:

'I shall either go distracted, or die, of this man. He comes upon me too late in life. I am not strong enough to bear him!'